Guitar
MAGAZINE

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AEROSMITH

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

BEHIND THE SCENES IN LAS VEGAS WITH JOE PERRY AND BRAD WHITFORD

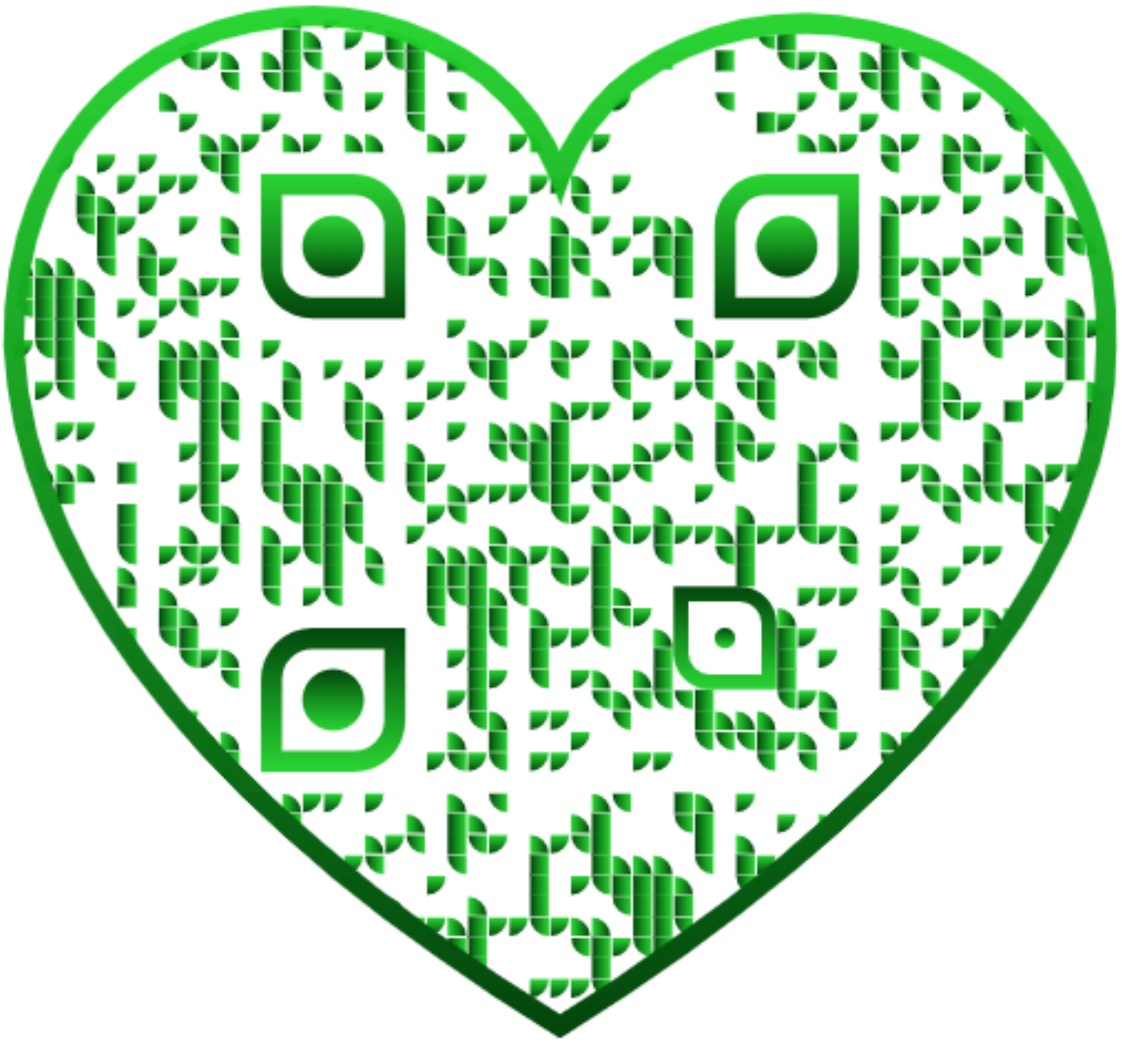
PLUS

TONE AND TECHNIQUE WITH TOMMY EMMANUEL & JERRY DOUGLAS

HOT NEW GEAR FROM FENDER, STRYMON, GRETSCH & BLACKSTAR

WHY COMEDIAN JEFF GARLIN IS SERIOUS ABOUT GUITARS

PLAY BLUES LIKE JIMMY PAGE



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BY
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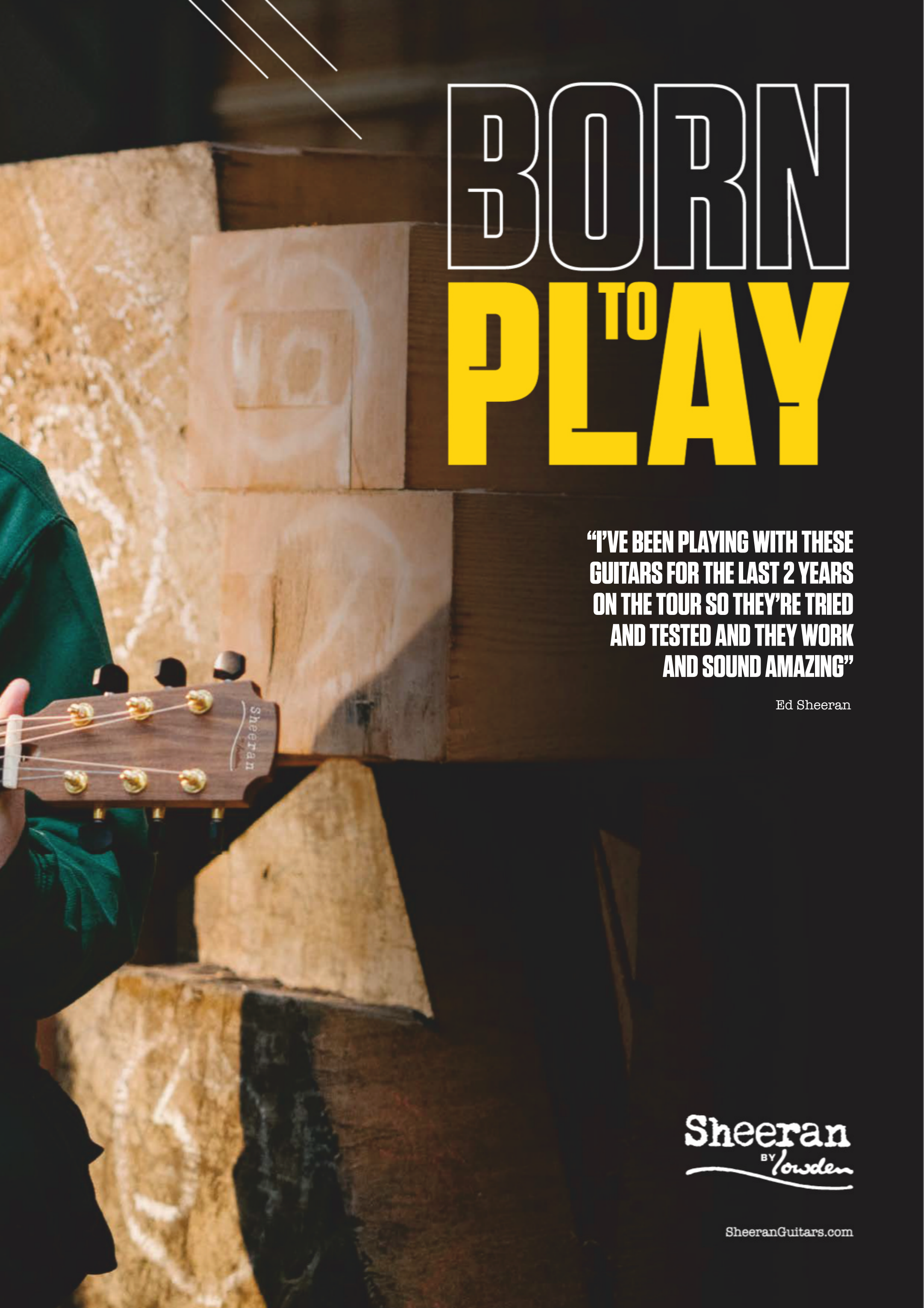
IRELAND



BORN TO PLAY

"I'VE BEEN PLAYING WITH THESE GUITARS FOR THE LAST 2 YEARS ON THE TOUR SO THEY'RE TRIED AND TESTED AND THEY WORK AND SOUND AMAZING"

Ed Sheeran

Sheeran BY Lowden

SheeranGuitars.com

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Staz Lindes of *The Paranoyds* plays the Lead III in Metallic Purple.

The Lead II & III

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EDITOR'S LETTER

TROUBLED TIMES

Sadly, everyone reading this will have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis in one way or another. The unprecedented and rapidly evolving nature of the situation probably makes the search for that perfect transparent overdrive pedal seem rather less pressing than it did a few weeks ago, but we will get through this eventually – and music should never be underestimated as a force for good and source of comfort.

Stuck indoors? Now is an opportune time to master the tricky guitar part or classic song you've always wanted to learn. With most musicians currently unable to perform in public, we can help them replace lost income streams by buying their records and merchandise, and even paying for guitar lessons over Skype.

Similarly, while many guitar shops have closed their doors to customers visiting in person, you can still support your favourite businesses by ordering online. It's also never been easier to collaborate with other musicians remotely.

Drop us a line at editors@guitar.com and let us know what content we can create to help you through the challenging weeks ahead – and don't forget about the wealth of great tuition and hours of video footage you can find on *Guitar.com*. Wishing you all the best from myself and the team – see you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

© Erica Echenberg / Redferns / Getty Images

Tony Iommi invented heavy metal while coping with the challenges of being a left-handed player

LEFT BEHIND

I started playing guitar in the late-1950s, when it wasn't easy to find a particular model of choice. I am left-handed and, in order to be able to pick up any guitar, I learnt to play a right-handed guitar left-handed. All the tutorial books showed the fretboard and chords in a right-handed fashion, so I learnt to adapt these shapes to play them effectively upside down. I think the late Dick Dale played like this, too, and I soon learnt to exploit the advantages.

Fast forward more than 60 years, however, and manufacturers still do not build left-handed versions of all their models. So many times when reading your reviews of beautiful guitars, I look in the spec column only to see "Left-handers: No".

Over the years, I have played with a lot of musicians, many of whom have been left-handed – and every one of those lefties struggled to find a guitar to suit them. So, can I say to all manufacturers, *please* will you produce more left-handed guitars?! I'm sure you will be surprised by the sales!

MICHAEL TURNER, VIA EMAIL

The lack of options – particularly affordable ones – is without doubt the most common complaint of southpaw guitar players, Michael, so you're certainly not alone in wishing that guitar companies offered more left-handed models in their ranges. Unfortunately, while demand is clearly there, the reality seems to be that the potential profits to be made often don't stack up against the extra tooling costs involved in manufacturing lefty guitars. The good news is that there are more great left-handed instruments out there than ever – but there's still a long way to go.

FOOL FOR YOU

You asked for our suggestions for guitar-related April fools, so how about this:

Fender celebrates the 40th anniversary of The Clash's classic *London Calling* album by producing a run of 40 limited-edition Paul Simonon signature P-Basses, each carefully relic'd and smashed to replicate the legendary album cover photo.

Each bass will be presented in a shatter-resistant plexiglass-fronted display case, and personally signed by Custom Shop Master Builder Yuriy Shishkov, who painstakingly recreated and then smashed each instrument to replicate every splinter with astonishing accuracy.

"After the labour of love that was my diamond-encrusted NAMM 2020 Coronation Strat, I had to find a new direction in which to take my art," says Shishkov, "and where better to go than in the opposite one with this bass?!"

So accurately destroyed as to be entirely irreparable, these 40 ultimate Relics are on sale for $40,000 each, including an additional replica (and fully working) reproduction of the original.

KENNETH PALMER, VIA EMAIL

Forget an April Fools' Day gag, Kenneth – you should have sent this idea to Fender last year for the company to honour the 40th anniversary of London Calling. Remind the Custom Shop again in about nine years and they might consider doing it for the 50th.

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

These days everyone is trying to sound like someone who's come before. Love him or loathe him, at least Jack White has a refreshing take on playing the blues and giving it some much-needed attitude.

PETER SMITH, VIA FACEBOOK

I remember in about 1975, there was a Burst almost identical to Gary Richrath's '59 in a pawn shop near me in Tulsa. I found out about it and went to see it but it had just sold to another buyer back east for $1,800. I was two days late!

ED REED, VIA FACEBOOK

Fender Marauders didn't "fall by the wayside" because they were "ahead of their time" – they were one of the ugliest guitars Fender ever designed! [*strongly disagree! – Ed*]

MICHAEL WALMSLEY, VIA FACEBOOK

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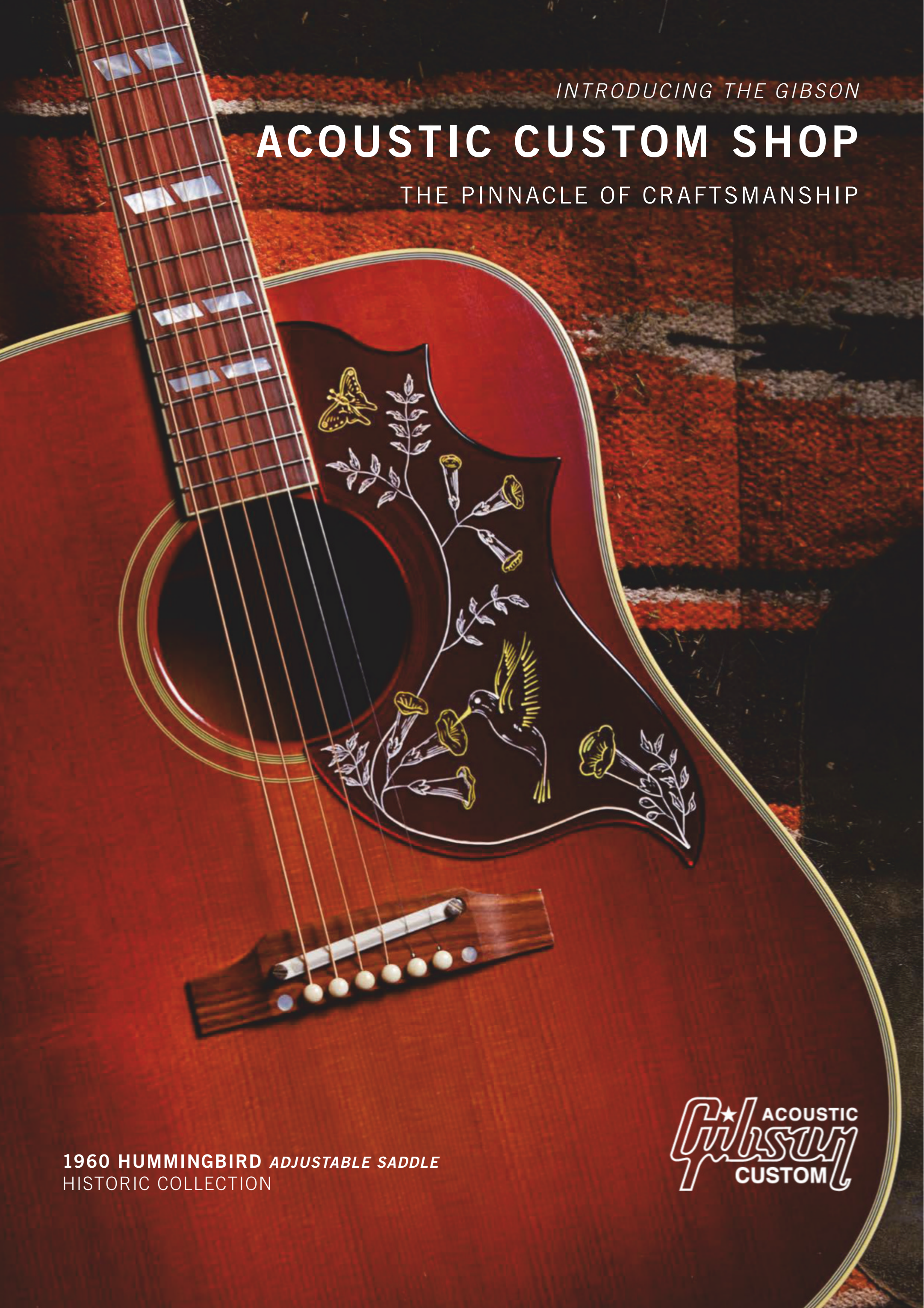

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ONES TO WATCH

DANA GAVANSKI

WORDS SAMMY MAINE

The Vancouver-based songwriter on her debut LP and the joy she finds in keeping things simple

Dana Gavanski's love affair with music began with her voice. Born to a Serbian family, she grew up immersed in the culture of *kafana* music, and began using it to channel her need for self-expression. This provided a gateway into guitar playing, through which she shuns pyrotechnics in favour of song-serving organic tones.

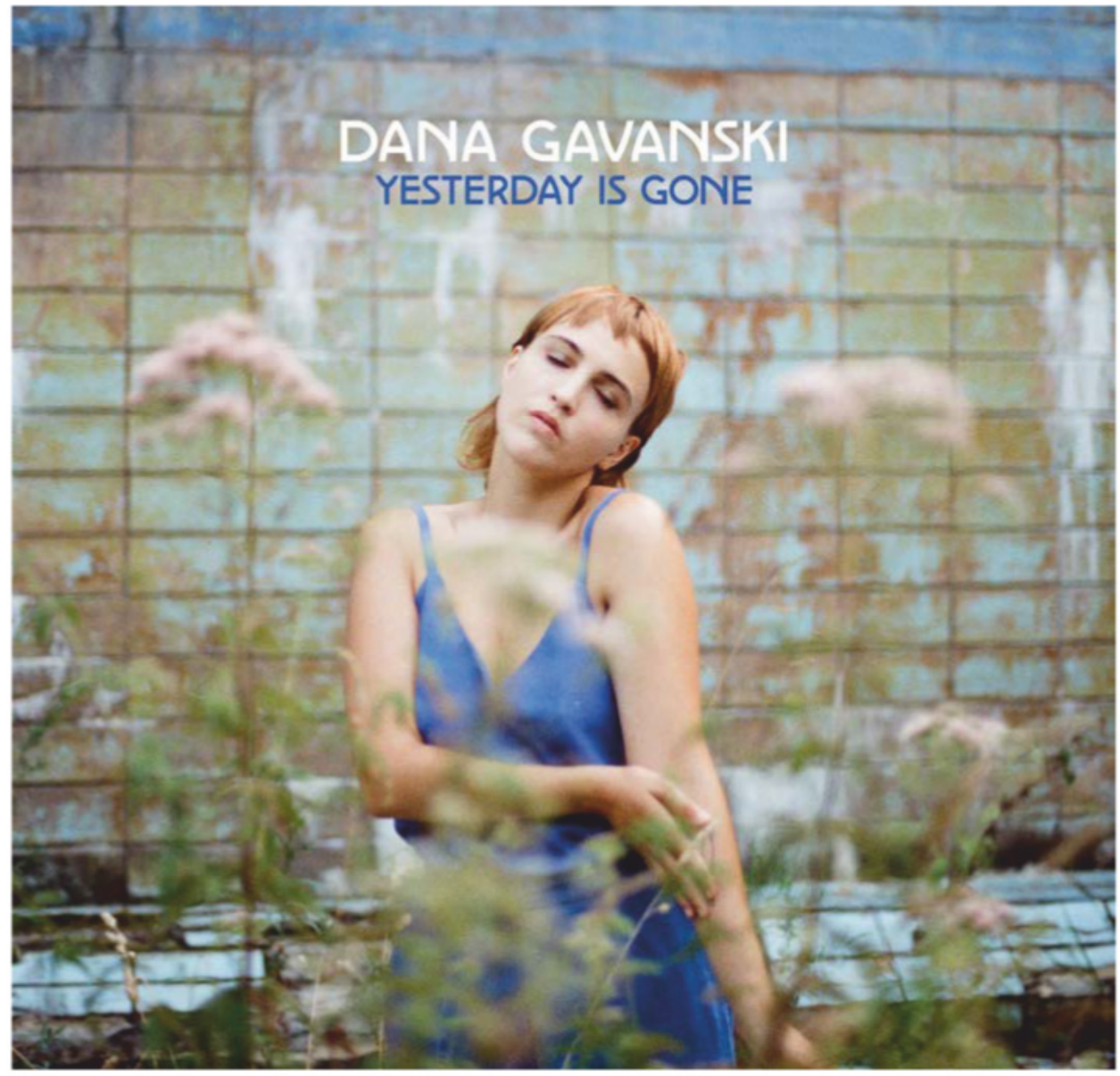
For evidence, look no further than her debut LP *Yesterday Is Gone*. It's a soft and introspective look at learning to express your emotions, which builds upon the delicate folk roots of her 2017 EP *Spring Demos*. More focused and determined than her previous work, the album sees Gavanski blending fingerpicked guitar with poppy synth to build a wonderful wall of sound.

When did you first pick up a guitar?

"At 18, I took some lessons but wasn't really connecting with the instrument, so I stopped playing after a few months. Later on, I took some piano lessons, so even after I stopped playing guitar I continued to explore instruments."

When did you rediscover the instrument?

"I had been eyeing it throughout my college years but didn't expect anything to come of it – I believed that I wanted to become an academic. I was in my last year and I had essays and projects, so when I picked up the guitar it was a calming experience. I thought I wanted to go into making soundscapes and more electronic music, but I quickly realised that I was tired of looking at a screen.



“I’M FINALLY STARTING TO THINK MORE ABOUT TONE AND EFFECTS AND WHAT I WANT. BEFORE, IT WAS JUST A QUESTION OF FOCUSING ON SONG STRUCTURE AND WORDS AND DELIVERY”

“The guitar served as a distraction from school, and was a way for me to create something more tangible, allowing me to see and feel the progress – learning how to play a chord, feeling the pain and calluses.”

Did your experience working with electronic music teach you anything about working with guitars?

“When I picked up the guitar the second time, I was learning mostly folk music, all these old folk songs and fingerpicking. That was my concentration at the time: how to fingerpick and play simple songs. It wasn’t until recently that I started to consider tone and texture more.”

You wanted to strip things bare on *Yesterday Is Gone*. What appeals to you about that kind of production?

“For me, it actually has a lot to do with my own limitations. I haven’t really been playing the guitar for all that long, and I’ve been constantly working on my technique and trying to learn more. I feel like I’m finally starting to think more about tone and effects and what it is I want. Before, it was just a question of focusing on song structure and words and delivery. With the production of this album, it was really easy to get lost in thinking about what sounds good and to feel this obsessive sense of imposter syndrome.

“What really helped me was working with Sam [Gleason, co-producer] and Mike [Lindsay of Tunng and Lump], and learning how to speak through the instrument in my own unique way. When I was working with Mike it was really freeing; there was no judgement. I felt like I could write any dinky little melody and most of it sounded bad but, eventually, after working through whatever it is you have in your mind, something comes out. There’s a great deal of beauty in simplicity and in limitation.”

What techniques did you use on the LP?

“The first section of *Other Than* is classical guitar – lugubrious strumming with a lot of effects on it, delay and this tape effect that we did in Mike’s studio. We used a tape-simulator effect on the classical guitar in the intro and outro, along with a surf guitar sound, and slide guitar with reverb. There was also a bit of phaser in the rhythm guitar.

“On *What We Had*, we built the sounds on the dry rhythm guitar and used theremin-like textures – it’s also known as violining the guitar, where you don’t hear the attack. That comes from the Memory Man pedal, with the blend and depth set high.

“On the album, I used my hollowbody Epiphone Casino, and there were some other guitar tracks overlaid onto it by Sam. It’s all quite new to me, speaking in technical language. I’m mostly just listening right now. It’s hard for me to know exactly what I’m listening to – but I know what I like.”

***Yesterday Is Gone* is out 27 March via Ba Da Bing Records**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

ELEPHANT STONE
HOLLOW

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The Canadian band famed for their combination of psych-rock and Indian music return with a dystopian sixth album

Their first full length LP since 2016, Elephant Stone's *Hollow* is the band's sixth album, recorded at frontman and band-leader Rishi Dhir's home studio Sacred Sounds. For this ambitious dystopian sci-fi concept album, Dhir looked deep into an abyssal void for inspiration – by which we mean Twitter. *Hollow*, he says, was influenced by the discontentedness he detects among social-media users.

"I set forth writing a song suite telling of a world of unhappy souls who have lost their connection with each other," says Dhir. Inspired by The Who's *Tommy* and the second side of The Beatles' *Abbey Road*, the record is split into two sides, entitled The Beginning and The Ending, and is all wrapped up in the band's renowned blend of garage and psych.

Elephant Stone debuted a decade ago, and includes Dhir alongside drummer Miles Dupire and guitarist Robbie MacArthur, as well as touring member Jason Kent on keys and guitar. The band have released five albums, toured North America and Europe, and have been nominated for the prestigious Polaris Music Prize. A well-regarded sitar player, Dhir has also collaborated with Beck and The Brian Jonestown Massacre. Here, he details the best guitar parts on *Hollow*.

HOLLOW WORLD

"We knew this song had something special so we took our time with it. To start the song, I wanted a modulated tremolo effect. I first tried my Epiphone Dot with a Reuss Repeater Fuzz mk II – a great pedal that lets you add a wah to the send/return – but couldn't get it to lock into the BPM. The 'Aha!' moment came when I plugged the guitar into my Novation Bass Station 2 synth and turned on the arpeggiator, modulation and tremolo. We then paired that with the repeater pedal and voila."

LAND OF DEAD

"I knew I wanted this song to be heavy. Most people think you need a Marshall or big amp to get that sound but the reality is that you just need a small tube amp that will start breaking up early. So, we plugged our Gibson ES-335 into my Silvertone 1432 and cranked it up. Then we just layered it with different pickup settings and we got Sabbath-heavy. Then we ran one of the riffing guitar lines through the Space Echo with max feedback – more heavy!"

KEEP THE LIGHT ALIVE

"Guitarmonies, I love them – Thin Lizzy, *Free Bird*. For the mid-section guitar solo, the guitar line was doubled – again using the 335 through the Silvertone – and then I harmonised his lines for the last couple of measures. It has this old school Kinks-meets-Badfinger feel to it."

THE CLAMPDOWN

"This track is a weird one, always changing and rarely repeating, arrangements-wise. I recently bought an Ibanez AD-220 Analog Delay & Multi-Flanger. It's a bucket-brigade delay and very different to my Space Echo – it gives off a Berlin-era David Bowie vibe. We didn't have a guitar part worked out so I just had Robbie vamp on my Epiphone Dot (with Lollar P-90s) while I ran it through a few effects. The 'Aha!' moment arrived when he started banging on muted strings with the flanger set up on the Ibanez. It gave this very cold, synthetic sound. That was it. We just kept the Ibanez on the guitar for the rest of the song."

FOX ON THE RUN

"This song was first demoed back in 2017. It was just me messing around and running a bunch of instruments – drum machine, guitar – through my Roland JC-120 and tracking some Farfisa bass. Fast forward to 2019 and I found I was pretty attached to the sounds I already had. It's a moody track and I needed something to really lift it in the chorus and the outro. Robbie brought in his Rickenbacker 360/12, added some compression and that was it – instant lift and jangle. Then I overdubbed some Omnichord through the Space Echo. Oh, and there's some wacky Eventide Harmonizer stuff on the vocals, inspired by Godley & Creme's *I Pity Inanimate Objects*."

Elephant Stone's album *Hollow* is out now on Elephants On Parade Records and Fuzz Club

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

HAIM
The Steps

The third release from Haim's forthcoming third album *Women In Music Pt III* is their most guitar-driven so far, and opens with a Kinks-inspired riff that's counterpointed by some soaring lead lines.

BIFFY CLYRO
End Of

The Scots return with an enjoyably old-school track led by a dirty bass riff and angular math-rock riffing. Simon Neil's vocals are at their explosive best, with twisted screams piercing the pre-chorus.

TOM MISCH & YUSSUF DAYES
Lift Off (feat Rocco Palladino)

Misch is back alongside drummer Yussuf Dayes for his second release on jazz label Blue Note. With guitars that echo Eddie Hazel or an acid-tinged John Mayer, this is a sumptuous soundtrack to a spring evening.

PORRIDGE RADIO
Circling

Indie's next great hope released their debut LP in March, and this single blends woozy avant-garde musicianship with introspective, worrisome lyrics. Expect arpeggiated synths and gang vocals above fuzzed-out guitars.

THE MAGIC GANG
What Have You Got To Lose

Difficult second album? Yeah, right. The Gang's second single from their sophomore LP is darker than the material on their self-titled debut, with guitar reminiscent of Sonic Youth and 1990s John Frusciante.

LUKE SITAL-SINGH
Undefeated

The LA-Brighton folk troubadour recently announced a new EP to follow 2019's *A Golden State*, recorded at Portland's Jackpot! Studios. Its simplistic approach brings to mind latter-day Nick Drake.

PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS
Rubbernecker

As the new bastions of psych-doom, Pigsx7 have been gaining traction thanks to the acclaim that followed their 2017 debut. The second release from their upcoming third record is a suitably trudging behemoth.

LOS BITCHOS
Pista (Great Start) – Live on KEXP

The multinational Los Bitchos bring all their influences to this guitar-driven performance for KEXP. Using Teisco Del Reys and Eastwoods, this band are helping keep the interest in instrumental guitar music alive.

THE ORIELLES
7th Dynamic Goo

Halifax's finest return with their second album *Disco Volador* – and this track is full of seventh chords and envelope-filtered sounds. Henry Carlyle-Wade has stepped up his guitar work here.

THE NATIONAL
Never Tear Us Apart

Recorded as part of the Songs For Australia benefit album, organised to strengthen rehabilitation efforts following the country's devastating bush fires, this INXS cover opens with unexpected synthesised drums.

KOKOROKO
Carry Me Home

One of London's finest collectives, Kokoroko continue to break ground with their bossa nova, bebop and avant-garde jazz crossovers. This track is held up by its exquisite horn section and superb underpinning guitar.

LIANNE LA HAVAS
Bittersweet

Her first new material in five years, Lianne La Havas is back with a stirring soul-inspired cut, a reminder of how great her voice and compositional prowess truly is. Expect 1960s-inspired drums and smooth, archtop guitars.

WIN A REDBEARD EFFECTS RED MIST MKIV
WORTH £189

When Mikey Demus realised that his ideal distortion pedal didn't exist, he had little choice but to make his own – with a helping hand from ThorpyFX.

Demus relies on cranked-up Orange amps for his signature tone, but always carries pedals for when he needs use hired backline without a suitable drive channel. After contacting Adrian Thorpe for advice, their conversation quickly turned into a business partnership, named in honour of the ragga-metal guitarist's glorious face-fuzz.

Enter, the Red Mist MKIV. A high-gain distortion pedal in a classy metal case, it features a three-way active tonestack, alongside the usual knobs for gain and volume. The clever mids control is a gyrator-based bandpass filter that Demus neatly describes as "the fun knob".

It all adds up to a hugely usable and tremendous-sounding heavy distortion that offers many flavours of wild. To enter this competition, head to the link below and answer the following question. Good luck.

What is the name of Mikey Demus' band?

a) Skinfear **b)** Skinhorror **c)** Skindred

Enter at: guitar.com/competitions
The closing date for this competition is 23:59 GMT, 5 May 2020

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THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

AEROSMITH'S JOE PERRY & BRAD WHITFORD

WORDS MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

After 50 years in one of America's most notorious and commercially successful rock bands, guitar gods Joe Perry and Brad Whitford have learnt a thing or two about putting on a show. We head to Las Vegas and go behind the scenes at Aerosmith's Deuces Are Wild residency to find out what it's like livin' on the edge…

Although it once had a reputation for anything-goes attitudes and X-rated billboards for equally X-rated nightclubs, today Sin City feels a little more sanitised than you might expect. On this particular weekend, the Strip is overflowing with families queuing up for candy at M&M's World, video-game luminaries networking before the annual DICE Awards, enterprising rappers peddling mixtapes to hapless passers-by who stray too close, and smiling showgirls offering Kodak moments for a modest fee.

Las Vegas and rock 'n' roll have much in common. Both the destination and the genre possess a waning notoriety, having reined in their behaviour over the past few decades in favour of safer, more corporate-friendly comportment. Rock music still bares its teeth but, these days, it rarely bites.

It's fitting, then, that we're here to see one of the last great rock bands, and find out how Aerosmith's famed guitar duo view the evolution of the music that's given them so much over the years.

ROCK ROYALTY

We meet Joe Perry in the 5,200-seat Park Theater at the Park MGM resort. His dressing room is a dimly lit, cosy home away from home, with antique rugs hanging on the wall behind the couch and tarnished firearms resting on the coffee table in front of it. Scarves adorn the makeshift apartment's ebony furnishings, strewn about selectively like snow on a model railway village.

Perry tidies up while *Viva Las Vegas* emanates from a nearby iPad. He momentarily switches over to Johnny Cash before abandoning the music entirely. "It's distracting," he says with a grimace, thoughtfully deferring to the nature of our visit.

Reclining with one of the last great guitar gods, the gravity of it all sets in: Joe Perry's name is synonymous with the instrument, yet he remains kind, accommodating and illuminating, carefully considering the questions before answering.

Congratulations on 50 years.
"Thanks, it's a big deal."

How have the residency shows differed from a normal tour?
"With not having to travel from city to city after every show, the wear and tear is a lot less. You get to play on the same stage with the same equipment, same sound system.

"The venue was designed for music. They used the [Beatles'] *Love* show as a blueprint for how to get the best event, so everybody feels like they're getting the best possible mix. When we heard it was that kind of building, we were excited about doing it."

How are the fans reacting?

"We've heard nothing but good from the fans. They say they can hear everything and it's loud but not painful. This place is, I have to say, one of the best indoor venues we've played over all these years.

"I thought I was going to be bored because it's the same venue but, in fact, it's been more exciting because every show gets a little bit better, and that goes for everything from production to the lights to the playing. I've actually heard everybody's playing get better over the past 30 shows."

Has it given you a chance to experiment?

"Always! If you're a guitar player who's captivated by the instrument, like I am, you want it to sound good – not only for me but for the house. Here, you can leave everything set up the same and, if something's wrong, you can tweak it. You figure out why it was good last night or what went wrong. It's a process."

Does the intimacy of the venue give you a different dynamic with the fans?

"It's been great to get a connection with the fans that you don't normally get in an arena, where you rely so much on the video screens and the huge PA systems. I use wedges like the old days and that way I can actually hear the audience shouting shit out. 'I love that song, I love that fucking hat you wore!' There really is an intimacy that I get from playing here."

How do you respond to that?

"When Elvis was learning to be a performer, he'd do a show at the hayride or at the county fair. He said, 'I'd wiggle my finger and I'd see a couple of girls scream. I did it again the next night and more girls screamed.'

"That's something you can do in this venue that you can't when you're going from city to city, playing to a different audience, a different culture. Texas is a different country to Florida, Atlanta and Detroit.

ABOVE Aerosmith's Deuces Are Wild concert residency is an elaborate blend of multimedia and rock 'n' roll

Gibson
Billie

"I ALWAYS FOLLOW THE SINGER. TO ME, HE'S LEADING THE CHARGE. BECAUSE STEVEN'S GOT SUCH GREAT SENSE OF RHYTHM, I GET MY TEMPO FROM HIM AND NOT THE DRUMMER"

But Vegas is a big mixing pot, it works just the opposite. Everybody's getting together from all parts of the world, and they're at our show because they want to hear a rock 'n' roll band."

Are you tweaking the setlist every night?

"Sometimes we'll change the set, other times we'll leave it the same. Sometimes I'll throw something in the set without even talking about it, I'll just start playing the song. I'll look at Steven and if he feels like doing it, then we'll do it.

"This is a really loose, honest-to-goodness rock 'n' roll show; this is as close as you're gonna get to being in a rehearsal room with Aerosmith."

Are you choosing the gear on a song-by-song basis, and are you bringing out old gear you haven't used in a while?

"I could probably do a show with two or three guitars, but because I've got the luxury of bringing my batch of guitars – the one I played on *Janie's Got A Gun*, the one I played on *Train Kept A-Rollin'* – I can bring *that* guitar to *that* song, and it makes it closer to how it should sound.

"Here, because the sound is so good, people can probably hear the difference between two guitars that they might not hear in a stadium, so it's worth bringing out all the good stuff. I try to bring as much of the studio vibe to the stage as I possibly can.

You seem to have an affinity for upside-down Strats. How come?

"I started doing that in 1979 with a left-handed Telecaster neck on a right-handed guitar. I'm left-handed, but I didn't know any better, so I started playing with right-handed guitars. There's definitely something to a left or right-handed Strat played by a guy who's just the opposite – certain technical things that are really minor but change the sound.

"I like the upside-down headstock, where the vibrato is, where the controls are. I played that guitar pretty much through the Joe Perry Project days until the band got back together.

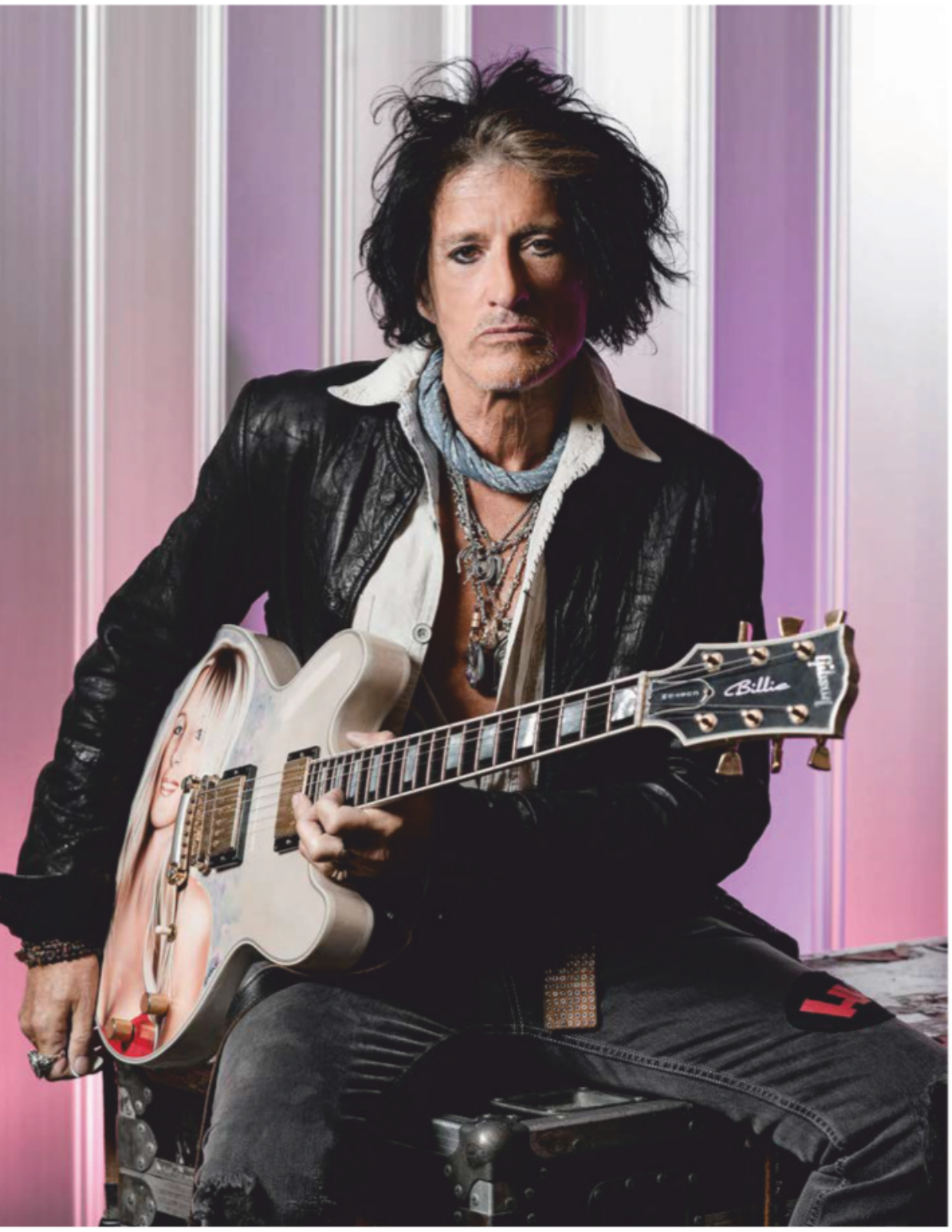
"Over the years I've had some other ones built for me, such as the Nelson guitars – he's actually the guitar tech for [Stone Temple Pilots bassist] Robert DeLeo. He built a couple for me and they've been my go-to Strats because they've got the right size neck and frets."

You've certainly got some other interesting guitars in your collection, too.

"I've got a friend, Kurt Hendrick, and we built this odd-shaped white guitar that we call Cloud 9. It's got a bunch of tweaky things and stuff that make it quite unique."

ABOVE According to Joe Perry, these shows are "as close as you're gonna get to being in a rehearsal room with Aerosmith"

FACING PAGE Joe cradling Billie, the Gibson ES-355 that's custom-painted in honour of his wife, Billie Paulette Montgomery



ABOVE Perry acknowledges that he's one of the last of his breed, admitting "the days of the guitar hero are kind of gone"

FACING PAGE Brad Whitford's Floyd Rose electric was given to him by Floyd himself

Like those pickups?
"Seymour Duncan makes these P-Rails that are half P-90 and half single-coil blade, and you can choose which combination you want. I don't understand why they aren't much more popular, but you can get some really interesting sounds out of them. I've had them put on at least three or four guitars now."

You also have quite the pedal-switching set-up on stage.
"I just had Bob Bradshaw build me an entirely new rig from the ground up because sometimes I'm over there [gestures to his right] and I want to be able to turn the thing off. With Bob's rigs you have about three different places you can turn shit on and off from. So I have the pedals in the back all set, and I have a set-up down at the very end of the stage for wah, another one on my microphone, and then Marco [see p32 for more from Aerosmith's guitar techs] has another one in the back. If I put a fuzz tone on and I run over there, he can turn it off. Then there's a couple of secret weapons we built into it."

We saw the oscilloscope...
"That's so I can see where the harmonics are popping in or out, depending on how hard I'm playing."

So that's not just for show, you're working off of that?
"Yeah, I look at it every once in a while to see how the volume is hitting the amps. There's a two-track recorder in there, some old military equipment that we've found to help analyse the sound. I don't want to explain any more of it – it's my own thing."

Your secret's safe with us.
"I could easily do the show with a stack of Marshalls and a wah pedal but, luckily, my hobby and my way of making a living go hand in hand, and I'm able to experiment with this stuff."

Your lead tone has always stood out. Where other guitarists might go bigger, bolder, more saturation, your sound is often much cleaner. Where does that come from?
"I just want to be heard, to hear the chords chiming. It's that balance, because Brad uses a little bit more compression and a little bit more cut, and his sound works for the leads and the rhythms that he plays."

Yet your individual sounds seem to work together so well.
"A lot of that is non-verbal. We kind of watch what the other is doing – what he's using for a rig, what I'm using for a rig. Even in the early days, when we only had a couple of guitars each, if he was using a Strat, I'd use a Gibson. It didn't make sense for us to both use humbuckers and Marshalls."

You have one of the most long-standing guitar partnerships in rock. Have your roles shifted over the years?
"If anything, our roles have become more defined. But he carries the ball more than people realise. Our backgrounds are different, he's a lot more classical, he knows more about music theory. Even if it's a song I wrote, I would often much rather play the rhythm part and let him play the lead that I played in the studio."

What about songwriting?
"My thing is, I always follow the singer. To me, he's leading the charge. Because Steven's got such great sense of rhythm, I get my tempo from him and not the drummer. He's spectacularly on-time, so as long as I can hear him, I know what direction I need to be steering things.

"We're all entertainers, so I want to give him the best bed he can have. Then, when it's time for me to do a solo, sometimes it's better to just not. You don't have to do a solo anymore."

No more solos? Say it ain't so...
"The days of the guitar hero are kind of gone. It's like any other instrument now – standard operating equipment. Back when we were starting, nobody had guitars that sounded like Zeppelin and the Stones – they were new instruments. All of those guys were experimenting with guitars played through distorted amps, and Hendrix was creating sounds that nobody had ever heard before.

"It was a phenomenal instrument as I was growing up. It's evolved to a point where even the shape of them is iconic. They represent freedom, America."

What about the state of the guitar in modern music?

"Kids today look at it as just one more instrument, one more voice with which they can write a song and help people grab onto it. They're coming up with melodies and songs, which is what it's all about. There are a lot of other great guitar players out there, people interpreting it from wherever they learnt it, whether its country or rock, pop, rap, whatever. It's adaptable.

"There was a point in time when walking around with a guitar case was a bit like walking around with a little baby dog today – it got the chicks to notice you. You might only know three chords but that was good enough to get a conversation going. These days, it's no big deal."

Perhaps the dogs are more effective.

"[Laughs] Yeah, things have levelled out now. It's not the same as it was in 1968, when you had Jimmy Page and everyone in the audience was there to hear *him*."

ABOVE Whitford's Cloud 9 Les Paul boasts Ron Ellis PAF pickups with zebra coils

Do you think there's anybody still carrying that torch?
"Jeff Beck. He's still a guitar hero. Still making sounds out of that thing that will stand out heads, hands and feet above everybody else. He knows there's always one more thing he can do, one more thing he could make it sound like, and he's still doing it. He's the fuckin' shit. Me? I'm still out there scruffing it out."

What ground is there left to cover? What's next for Aerosmith?
"All I know is that because we've had so many generations of fans, a lot of them don't know the songs from back in the early days, so I want to bring them back into the set. I don't see a reason to write a new album when we have five albums from the 1970s that most people don't know about.

"Those are the songs that influenced Slash, that influenced the Foo Fighters, that influenced all those bands that come up and say, "I picked up the guitar because of *Toys In The Attic*." I look at them as brand-new songs, so we're still fucking around with them."

EYE OF THE STORM

Compared to Perry's, Brad Whitford's dressing room seems spartan. There are, of course, some plush seats in the corner, a table with a stack of *Get Your Wings* LPs – presumably waiting to be signed – and a sunburst Les Paul laid across the arms of another chair. It's clear that for Whitford, this is a place of work, not leisure.

Whitford is welcoming and friendly, but a commanding presence. Later, when an aide informs us it's time to wrap up, he's reassuring. "Go on, take as much time as you need," he says. "It's my call."

He's also extremely good at navigating an interview. His answers are concise and focused but never dismissive. He knows exactly the point he's trying to make and, like the consummate guitar master he is, knows when he's said enough.

Did you think it would go on this long when you joined the band?
"Well, of course. [Laughs] I mean, no way! Couldn't imagine it. We came from that era where Mick Jagger was saying, "I'll be doing something else by the time I'm 30". So there was the sense that maybe we can't do this forever but, hey, look at Mick!"

How has this residency differed from your usual shows and tours?
"Travel is not an issue. I can walk over here from my room, the show's over at 10:20pm and I'm back by 10:50pm. So you have a lot more time to do the things you want to do. I'm not a gambler or anything but we have fun here."

Has it given you the chance to experiment?
"Absolutely. I keep fine-tuning and I mean *fine*-tuning."

Incremental.
"You get to listen to your rig so much and I can come over here any time I want to play with it. It's been a real joy."

Have you pulled out old pieces of gear for these shows?
"I brought a lot of amplifiers with me from home, from storage. I tried out a lot of different stuff before I landed where I am."

How are the 3 Monkeys and Magnatone heads working out?
"They're fantastic. They're basically modded Marshall and Fenders, hybrid schematics that have been around for years. The Magnatone is a perfected 50-watter. I've combined the 3 Monkeys with a lot of other stuff, sometimes it's a Marshall, sometimes another 3 Monkeys."

"When I'm recording I'll use the 20-watt Sock Monkey amp. We did a session here with Buck Johnson. I used my Les Pauls and Teles straight into the Sock Monkey – no effects, nothing. People go, 'How'd you get that sound?' When it's naked like that, you can put it right in your face. I love it."

It seems these days that Joe is gravitating toward a lot of custom builds, whereas you tend to stick with the classics.
"All the tools have been around for as long as I have. It's like, how do you improve on a Stratocaster? How do you improve on a Les Paul? That doesn't really happen. There are a lot of knock-offs, but to me you can't really beat them."

I imagine that at this point you've played just about every guitar out there.
"If I go into a music store and play every Strat they have, there's always one that'll jump out of the pack. Sometimes there's this synergy between the neck wood and the body wood. In some instances they really love each other. I've played guitars that might as well be doorstops."

Is there a certain sound you're chasing?
"I'm not chasing anything right now, at this point it's just fine-tuning. I used to have guitars where I'd throw some pickups in, thinking that it'll make it sound better, but if the wood's not co-operating it doesn't work. It's all about the wood.

"When you have a good guitar, throw some good-quality pickups in there and it just goes up again. If you try and put those pickups in a guitar that's not up to it, you're just wasting your time."

So it's all about the wood, for you?
"Oh yeah, you can feel it in the guitar. I like to play a guitar unplugged first – a guitar will tell you things about itself, how it vibrates, and if it's not ringing, it's just not going to ring. You can change pickups, install new hardware, but it's all a waste of time. I found that out the hard way."

What got you into the guitar in the first place?
"What sent me over the top was the British Invasion. The Beatles were so profound to me and this stuff kept coming from England, which was interesting because so much of it was American blues being reinterpreted. They did it their way. I studied Clapton, I was fascinated by his playing. Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, of course."

"IF ANYTHING, WE'VE GROWN CLOSER AS FRIENDS. I HAVE THE STRONGEST BOND WITH HIM, OVER ANYBODY ELSE IN THE BAND. AS GUITARISTS, WE SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE"

"There are so few people waving the rock flag now. It's crazy to me that all the young guys have to go over to Europe to get an audience. Rival Sons is like a treasure to people over there."

Who else is carrying the torch, in your opinion?
"There are a lot of young guys, I can't name them all. Rival Sons, Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown – one of the best fuckin' shows I've ever seen. And every time I see them, they're better than the last time. So there's still hope."

How has the dynamic between you and Joe shifted over time?
"I'm not in the background as much as I used to be. It's my opportunity to play, they can try and stop me! If anything, we've grown closer as friends. I have the strongest bond with him, over anybody else in the band. As guitarists, we speak the same language."

You complement each other so well, musically speaking.
"It's organic. It always just happens."

No discussion?
"Rarely. In the early days I'd say, 'Oh, he's playing that Strat, so I'll play my Les Paul'. Sometimes two of the same guitars is fine, but it's always more harmonically complex to have a Les Paul and a Tele or a Strat."

We were really happy to hear stage volume during soundcheck.
"It's like it doesn't exist anymore! I'm not into the Kempers but I appreciate what they do – it's so great the way this stuff has come along. Def Leppard uses them and the sound is so close to the original records, it's glorious. I went to see Steve Miller and it's a stunning sound up front, but then you stand on the side of the stage and there's nothing. It's weird but it works.

"I think it's much easier to mix out front if you isolate it but, you know, we're old-school. It's about plugging into a good amplifier and going for it. To me, that's part of what real rock 'n' roll is – it has to have some chaos to it. It's always a battle."

What's the process of creating the Aerosmith vibe?
"Every part of the song has to be a hook. You can't have any dead spaces. When we were recording, Steven was always pushing for something different.

Steven studied The Beatles so intensely he knew what made good songs. He taught me a lot about song construction. He was a perfectionist but it would always turn into quality. It still stands on its own!

"It feels very special to have made a real musical statement in this world, music that millions of people appreciate and listen to. I don't know what else you can ask for as a musician."

It seems like Aerosmith never shied away from trying new things.
"It was always very creative in the studio, we were always doing crazy things. We put a big piece of plywood on the floor, Steven put tambourines on his boots, and we recorded it. We used coconuts for the clippity-clop, and Steven did the whip sound from *Back In The Saddle* with a real whip."

We'd love to see the mic setup for that...
"[Laughs] I don't know how we even did that. And [producer] Jack Douglas was always such an inspiration, we called him the sixth member. Always messing around with the tape machine."

After such a long and prosperous career, what key lessons have you learned along the way?
"I've learned a lot about how to play the guitar, about how the guitar is supposed to work. If you hit it too hard, it sends out a shockwave. I find that the lighter I play, the more the guitar gets to talk. I had to work on that because when you start getting into something, instead of being loose and free, all of a sudden you're tight, your whole body tenses up.

"I had to do a lot of meditation and projection. I picture myself on stage being in a relaxed state. I try to bring that into my playing and it makes all the difference. You can see it in John McLaughlin's playing – he has this incredible centre. Steve Vai and Eric Johnson are the same. Just completely effortless, extremely intelligent."

Is there any ground left for Aerosmith to cover?
"We'll see. We've been doing this a long time and 50 years is a lot of wear and tear. Just to still be here is an absolute miracle. To have the original members too – it's bizarre.

"There's lots of stuff I still want to do. I'm experimenting with some other stuff. When I get back to Nashville, I'm getting together with David Santos and Joe Vitale. We'll see what comes out of that. You never know."

SHOW TIME

After a brief respite and a beverage, we scurry back to the Park Theater to attend a show that begins with a 40-minute acid-tinged retrospective film, replete with career-spanning interviews and performance clips projected across eight enormous screens. Costumed mascots dance across the stage beneath, while a countdown clock tells the already lubricated audience how much time they have left to get a top-up on their beer.

Not long later, the house lights go down and before us appears a grinning Steven Tyler, who hollers to the crowd, "Sin Citaaaaaaaaay!"

The crowd hollers back.

Much later, after a blistering show culminates with a thrilling encore of *Dream On*, featuring Tyler on a previously concealed piano, the band departs and we follow suit. Patrons buzz about their favourite moments from the show as they flood back out onto the casino floor, and many seem to scarcely believe that they have just witnessed such a satisfying performance from Aerosmith – one of the world's last great rock 'n' roll acts – in 2020.

Reflecting on the day, it would seem that the guitar isn't nearly as dead and buried as so many naysayers have recently portended. While it's no longer the lightning rod it once was, Aerosmith's six-stringers make a case for its position as a songwriting tool, a method for maximum sonic impact. Perhaps that's where it truly belongs. G

For information on Aerosmith's Deuces Are Wild residency and other upcoming tour dates, visit aerosmith.com

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WHAT Happens in VEGAS

Aerosmith's Vegas residency has given Joe Perry and Brad Whitford the opportunity to experiment with their smorgasbord of gear. We talk to their guitar techs to find out about the special sauce…

WORDS MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

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1 Joe Perry's unusual Cloud Nine guitar was custom-built by Kurt Hendrick

2 This natural-finish reverse S-type was built by Bruce Nelson, and boasts a left-handed MannMade vibrato with a right-handed arm

3,4 Perry's Gibson ES-355 is painted with front and back-facing portraits of his wife, Billie Paulette Montgomery

5 Another reverse-body Bruce Nelson model, which Joe christened the Admiralcaster

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Before the photo session, before the interviews, before the riotous rock 'n' roll masterclass we receive while witnessing Aerosmith live in concert, we meet Marco Moir and Greg Howard. As the guitar techs for Joe Perry and Brad Whitford, respectively, it's Moir and Howard who keep the six-stringers – and this momentous show – ticking over night after night.

Moir has been with the band since 2010. He began as Whitford's tech before moving over to work with Perry a few years later. He's excitable and eager to give us as much of a rundown of the guitarist's gear as time will allow. Ushering us backstage, he walks us around to his stage-left tech station and then out to an impressive, imposing sight – Perry's monolithic wall of amplifiers.

A centre column of Supro and Friedman cabs is flanked by two rear-facing Friedman heads atop four Marshall pinstripe 4x12s. The bottom two cabs are of the tall Hendrix-style variety, while the top two are standard angled models that are oriented upside-down. What advantage this configuration offers isn't immediately clear and, while Moir isn't quite willing to unravel the mystery for us, he is in agreement that it looks exceedingly cool.

In an array of oversized road cases next to the Marshalls sit a few small Supro amps, all mic'd and isolated from stage volume. The stage rig also features a refrigerator-sized case full of Fluke decibel meters and Veeco gauges beneath a green-and-black readout. The tower is tall and intimidating, like some sort of sci-fi supercomputer.

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6 Former Aerosmith road manager Mark Lehman is depicted on this MOE model – the same artwork also adorned the band's first touring van, which is on display at the show

7 The Dan Armstrong 'Plexi' has found its way into the hands of many stars over the years, not least Mr Perry

8 Perry's signature Les Paul Axcess sports a single humbucker and a Wilkinson vibrato bridge

9 Joe pulls out this Danelectro 12-string for *Seasons Of Life*

10 This is a replica of Perry's 1959 Les Paul Standard. The original guitar went through the hands of Eric Johnson and Slash before finding its way back to Perry

To the left, there's an oscilloscope and a reel-to-reel tape machine performing some indiscernible and presumably indispensable task. Unsurprisingly, these are also shrouded in secrecy – what Moir knows, he isn't telling. Mysteries abound; the mental notes are stacking up.

One secret he is willing to discuss is the curious footswitch tucked between the amp stacks. It's hooked up to a tiny amplifier above, which appears to be an Alessandro Bone Yard stripped of its livery. Whatever it is, it's cranked all the way up and connected to a single speaker of one of the 4x12 cabs.

Its purpose? So that Perry can walk up to that cab, hit the switch and be greeted by easily controllable feedback at moderate volume. It's a brilliant solution for a sound that's meant as punctuation rather than a peal. In a venue such as the 5,200-seat Park Theater, having the rig constantly cranked for feedback could present some serious problems.

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11 Joe Perry's almighty amp rig is a thing of beauty

12 Gamechanger's Plasma distortion pedal and J Rockett's Archer overdrive unit are but a few of Joe's many playthings

13 Perry's toys aren't in the attic but nestled in assigned cabinet drawers – this one is for delay and echo effects

14 An Electro-Harmonix POG, DryBell Uni-Vibe clones and more reside in the bottom drawer

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FOOT STOMPING

Full disclosure: try as we might, we couldn't fully unravel the deep mysteries of the Massachusetts-born rocker's signal path – and it wasn't for lack of trying. We've been sworn to secrecy on a few matters, too, but there are a few things we can show you.

Near the front of his chain, Perry uses a SoloDallas Schaffer Replica, a legendary preamp that recreates the sound and response of the Schaffer–Vega Diversity System wireless units of the 1970s, long touted as the secret to Angus Young's blistering guitar tone.

The bulk of Perry's effects are stored in drawers backstage and linked up to an enviable Bradshaw switching rig, a set-up that leaves the stage relatively uncluttered. In those cabinet drawers are all manner of delights, such as the MXR Ten Band EQ, a DryBell Unit67 compressor, Gamechanger Audio's Plasma distortion unit, and a J Rockett Audio Designs Archer overdrive pedal.

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For modulation and pitch, there are DryBell Vibe Machine and Uni-Vibe pedals, a Tsakalis Audio Works Phonkify envelope filter, a Electro-Harmonix POG, a Fulltone Ultimate Octave, and a Diamond Tremolo. Delay and echo comes from the Dunlop Echoplex Delay, Wampler Faux Tape Echo, and Strymon Volante.

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At Perry's mic station, there's a sparse pedalboard with a bank of switches for his most-used backstage effects, although he has a few pedals up front as well. On the board, you'll find a fifth-generation Digitech Whammy, an MXR Boost/Line Driver, a Real McCoy Custom wah, and various tap tempo switches for his time-based effects. Less breathtaking but no less important, there's also a cup filled with mints on the mic stand, presumably to keep Perry's playing fresh. When you gotta chew, you gotta chew.

REVERSE ENGINEERING

Joe is a big fan of upside down S-type guitars built by Bruce Nelson. Each of the Aerosmith guitarist's California models feature reverse bodies and necks, left-handed MannMade vibratos with right-handed arms, and locking tuners. The black one, which Perry christened the Admiralcaster, is equipped with Joe Barden pickups and is incredibly lightweight. The white Nelson, the very first build Nelson completed for Perry, has a trio of Lollar pickups with an onboard anti-hum system. The natural model sports Fralin Noiseless Stratocaster pickups. All the Nelsons share a modified treble-side cutaway for easier access to the upper frets.

One of the most noteworthy guitars in the rack is a Gibson Custom replica of Joe's storied 1959 Les Paul Standard. As the story goes, he sold his original tobacco-hued Burst in the 1970s and lost track of it until 1984, when then-owner Eric Johnson offered to sell it back to him. Perry hadn't the cash and had to decline. He rediscovered the guitar in the hands of Slash five years later, in 1989. Perry bugged Slash to sell it for years, but to no avail. Then, on what must have been a particularly happy 50th birthday for Perry in 2000, the top-hatted guitarist presented it to him as a gift.

The guitar pictured here is replica #001 of that Les Paul, Tom Murphy-aged and showing off distinctive wear around the neck-volume control and a lovely reverse chevron top. It's a stunning piece with a beautifully checked finish, aged hardware and a few key gouges in the top, just like the original.

Then there's Billie, the custom ES-355 painted with front and back-facing portraits of Billie Paulette Montgomery, Joe's wife of 35 years. The guitar has no f-holes, a simplified volume and tone control layout, and hot pickups specifically wound for Perry. Though it appears to have a white base colour, upon closer inspection, it's actually an iridescent pearl.

15 Let there be rock: the SoloDallas Schaffer Replica imitates the legendary wireless preamp that helped give Angus Young his high-voltage tone

16 Joe's tech draws the line at telling us too much about the oscilloscope and reel-to-reel tape machine in Perry's rig

17 Just push play: Joe's Bradshaw switching system runs the show

18 Perry's onstage pedalboard boasts a Digitech Whammy, an MXR Boost/Line Driver, a Real McCoy Custom wah, and more

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19 Monkey on my back: 3 Monkeys gear is at the heart of Whitford's amp rig

20 Rock the nation: this Gibson STP Burst is a recreation of the guitar Ronnie Montrose used to record his 1973 album *Montrose*

21 Whitford's pedalboard, featuring a DryBell Unit67, a Vick 73 Ram's Head, a silver Klon Centaur and more

22 Brad's Gibson Cloud 9 Les Paul is a limited-run chambered model from the mid-2000s

Perry also wields two of his Gibson Les Paul Axcess signature models these days: one in black, the other in Gold Rush. These stripped-down LPs feature a single 498T humbucker pickup, simplified controls for volume and a coil-split tone knob, a roller nut, and a Strat-style Wilkinson vibrato. They're light and wildly resonant guitars.

There are many more interesting pieces in this collection, including Perry's Kurt Hendrick-built custom Cloud Nine guitar, which is loaded with Seymour Duncan P-Rail pickups with special switching for selecting either unit, as well as the active coil. Perry also has a P-Rail-equipped MOE (Made On Earth) guitar notable not just for its sonic traits but for its aesthetic homage to a big part of the band's history. The instrument is customised with an artistic rendering of Aerosmith's former road manager Mark Lehman that was originally found on the side of the band's first touring van. Lehman is referenced in the song *Mama Kin* – "bald as an egg at 18" – and his likeness and the van are both on display at the show.

Perry uses a drop-D-tuned Danelectro 59 12-string on the song *Seasons Of Life* and brings out the Dan Armstrong for *Let The Music Do The Talking*, the opening number at tonight's show.

MONKEY BUSINESS

Over on the other side of the stage sit Whitford's amps and, behind them, Greg Howard. Alongside Whitford and designer Ossie Ahsen, Howard is one of the titular primates that make up the 3 Monkeys amplifier company. The firm creates incredible-sounding amplifiers – if you haven't experienced one for yourself yet, we highly recommend seeking one out. Whitford's input has been invaluable in sculpting their incredible sound, so it's doubly interesting to finally hear one in its most foundational context.

The main components of Whitford's stage rig include the following: on one side, there's an Ahsen-built 3 Monkeys Orangutan Pro head running a pair of 5881 power tubes in place of the usual quartet of 6V6s, as well as larger output transformers. On the other, there's a new, entirely stock Magnatone M-80 Super Fifty-Nine head that Whitford refers to as a "perfected 50-watter".

Each head runs into its own matching chequered Marshall 4x12 loaded with Celestion Greenback speakers. The two red Twin-sized 3 Monkeys 2x12 cabs are loaded with mismatched Celestion speakers: one Ruby alnico and one Greenback in each open-backed cabinet.

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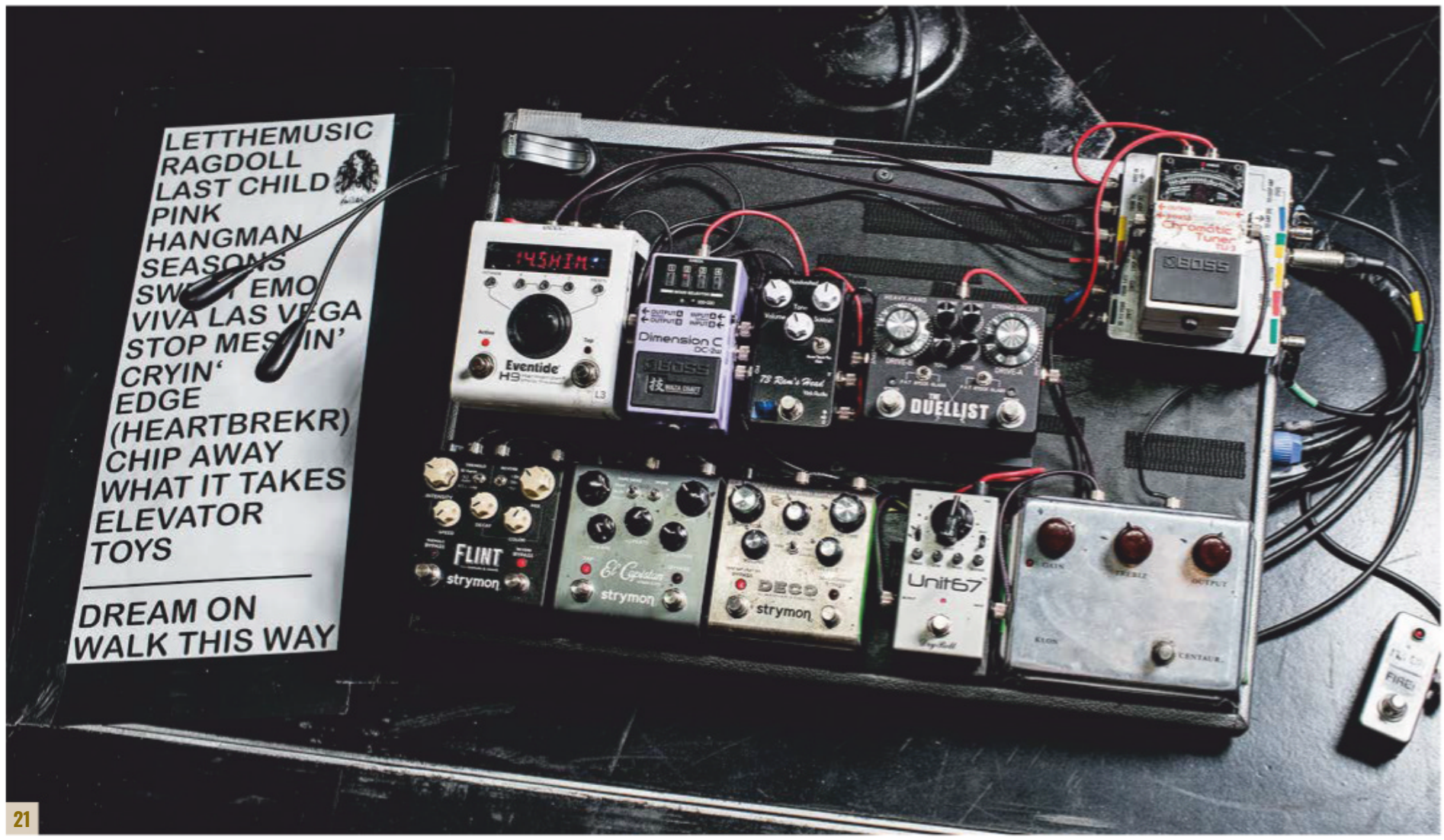

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While Whitford's amplifier set-up is far simpler than Perry's, he employs a bank of pedals to augment his sound. From his Shure AD4D wireless system, his guitar signal goes to an interface box custom-built by Howard, of which he says, "it allows us to run wet effects either in front of the amps or through the effects loops without unplugging anything".

Brad's pedalboard features a host of interesting effects. For drive and compression, there's a silver Klon Centaur and the "always on" DryBell Unit67, essentially a classic 1176 Compressor in stompbox format. For boost, there's KingTone's The Duellist, and a Vick Audio 73 Ram's Head for Gilmour-style solo sounds.

After the boost section are the Strymon Deco and El Capistan for slapback and delay, and a Flint for reverb. After the Flint, all effects run in stereo, including the Boss Waza Craft Dimension C chorus pedal and the Eventide H9, which Whitford uses to add ambience via the modified Shimmer patch. Backstage, Howard controls a TC Electronic Quintessence harmoniser for "about three seconds of the solo in *Last Child*".

As you might expect, all DC and patch cables are of the 3 Monkeys Solderless variety, and the pedals are powered by Strymon Zuma and Ojai power supplies.

As for the pedal alarmingly emblazoned with the words "I'm on fire", that's not for sound at all. When Brad steps on that, a red light turns on backstage to let Greg know that there's a problem out front.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

When it comes to guitars, Whitford boasts a slew of enviable instruments. We'll begin with his main squeeze, a Gibson Cloud 9 Les Paul. The Cloud 9 series was part of a mid-2000s run of chambered reissue guitars in conjunction with retailer Music Machine. Originally this guitar would have come with Burstbuckers but it now sports a set of Ron Ellis PAF pickups with zebra coils.

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23 Whitford says he could play the whole show with the PRS Silver Sky

24 Brad's PRS 594 features new pickups direct from the 2020 NAMM Show

As for the other Les Pauls in Whitford's Ultracase, we were fawning over the gorgeous Gibson Custom Collector's Choice #28 STP Burst, made to recreate the fabled, faded guitar Ronnie Montrose used to record his 1973 album *Montrose*. This has been modded with WCR Darkburst pickups (wound to Duane Allman specs) and, like other stoptail guitars in Whitford's stable, is strung top-wrapped. There's also a 1997 '58 Reissue Sweet Cherry Les Paul based on George Harrison/Eric Clapton's famous Lucy, also with Darkburst pickups and wearing a Bigsby (this is Greg's favourite of the bunch).

Whitford has a few PRS guitars at the ready, including the 594, featuring new PRS pickups straight from NAMM 2020. There's also the Silver Sky, of which Whitford is a huge fan. "I play it every night," he says. "I could literally play the whole show with it if I wanted to. But I've got all these other pretty guitars that I like to show off."

Other guitars include a NAMM 2020 Guild Aristocrat, a Green Guitar Project T-style made of reclaimed wood and graphics designed by Howard, and a Charvel Pro-Mod San Dimas Style 1 that's a replica of Whitford's original Japanese flag model, which we're told now lives in the Hard Rock Cafe collection. The Aerosmith man also slings a new Floyd Rose guitar given to him by Floyd himself.

Four Fenders round out the set. There's a Strat made of pine by the Custom Shop, without a truss rod in the neck. A 1985 '62 reissue Strat in Surf Green, loaded with Dimarzio HB2 and Area 58 pickups, is used for *Let The Music Do The Talking* and strung with flatwound D'Addario Chromes in DGDGBD tuning. There's a Custom Shop Heavy Relic Stratocaster that features the same pickup complement, as well as a Custom Shop Clapton model in 7up Green, built for Whitford and using Clapton mid-boost electronics with Lace Sensor pickups.

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25 A replica of Whitford's original Charvel San Dimas Style 1 model – the original now lives in the Hard Rock Cafe collection

26 Brad's Floyd Rose guitar was a gift from Floyd himself

27 Greg Howard's pick of Whitford's guitars is this Sweet Cherry Les Paul

28 Howard at his tech station, tuning up a Custom Shop Strat

29 This T-Style from the eco-friendly Green Guitar Project has Howard-designed graphics, with Whitford's initials

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30 Whitford's pine-bodied Custom Shop hardtail Strat has no truss rod in the neck

31 Gotta love it: Brad's Custom Shop Clapton model in 7up Green

32 This 1985 '62 reissue Strat in Surf Green has Dimarzio HB2 and Area 58 pickups

CHECK ONE TWO

Our time admiring Whitford's rig comes to an end as the techs takes their positions for soundcheck. After a quick four-count, the team roars into life with a solo-laden rendition of *Viva Las Vegas* – what else?

On any other night, this group of musicians could likely headline any venue they wanted. Each tech is a top-notch instrumentalist in their own right – which can't hurt given their day jobs – and the precision and raw talent on display whets the appetite for tonight's show. Sadly we're unable to take any of Joe or Brad's guitars home with us afterwards – dream on. G

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WORDS MICHAEL WATTS **PORTRAITS** ELEANOR JANE

As two of the most beloved and respected players in their fields, Tommy Emmanuel and Jerry Douglas operate in a rarified environment that most guitarists can only dream of. As they join forces on the road, we sit down with the dynamic duo for a wide-ranging discussion on tone, technique and the beauty of a good trainwreck

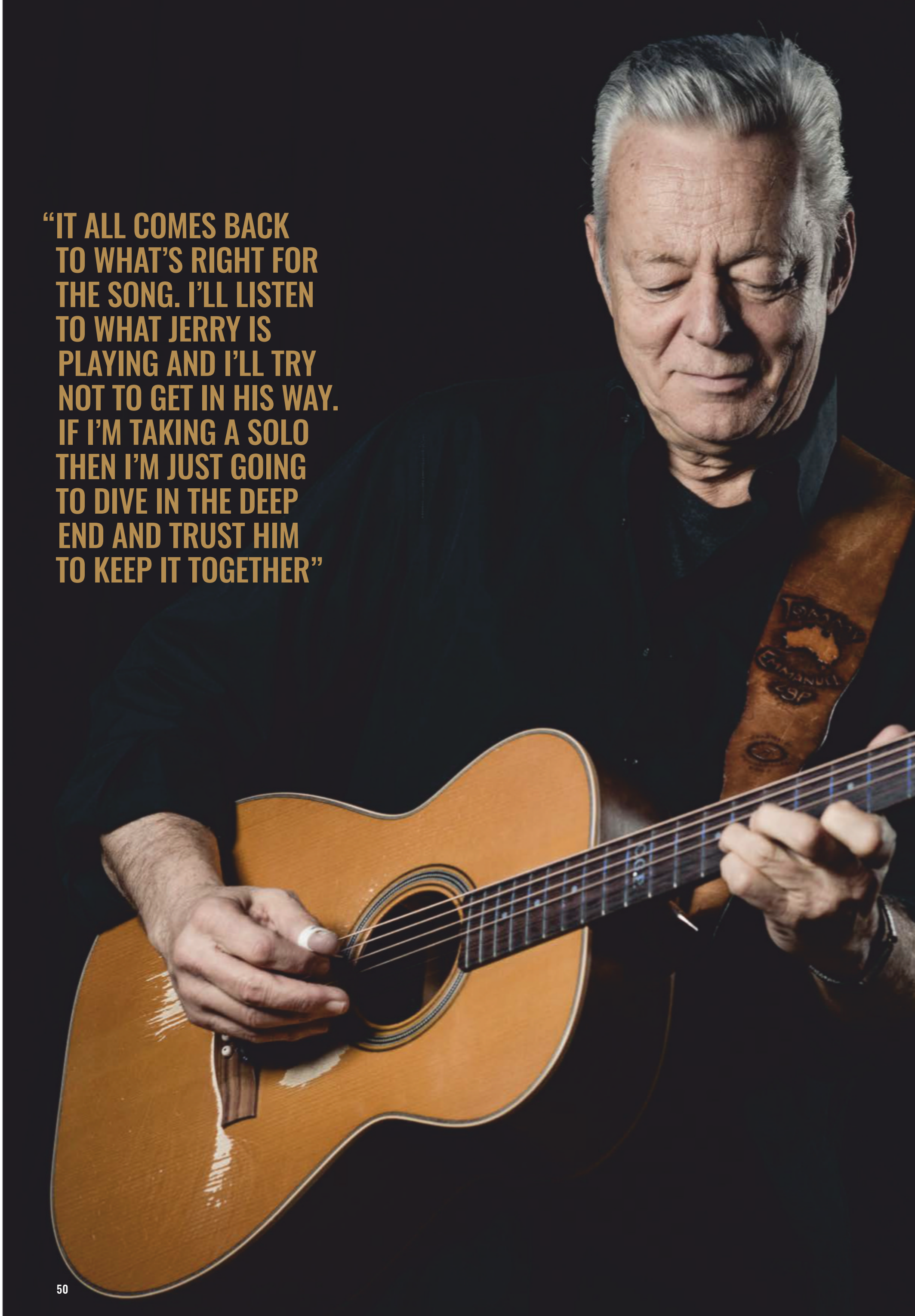
Tommy Emmanuel and Jerry Douglas sit at the top tier of their chosen instrument. Emmanuel is widely acknowledged as one of the finest acoustic guitarists alive and has an adoring pan-continental audience. As the undisputed lord of the dobro, Douglas has had to reinforce his home's shelving to cope with the weight of his 14 Grammy awards and other gold-plated honours, all received for his work on more than 1,600 albums.

The duo are in London for one night only, as part of the Transatlantic Sessions tour. Given their easy rapport, it's hardly a surprise that their first meeting was one of seemingly inevitable happenstance.

Jerry Douglas: "I was hanging out with Ricky Skaggs one day and he asked, 'Have you ever met Tommy Emmanuel? He's incredible.' I hadn't, but I wanted to. One day, my wife and I went to a comedy show in Nashville. It was sold out but there was an empty seat next to me and who comes up and sits in it? Tommy. I thought, 'Oh shit! Here he is! Now we can talk.' And we did."

Tommy Emmanuel: "I've been a fan of Jerry since the 1970s but I didn't grow up as a bluegrass player. I was a country guy who played rock 'n' roll and a bit of jazz. I've always been an accompanist and, actually, Jerry and I have a lot of similarities in that regard. He's played on everyone's records and he knows what to play and what not to play. We can go as far out on a limb as we want and still have a lot of fun, and we can also play very contained and enjoy that just as much."

"THE KEY TO WHAT WE DO IS LISTENING TO EACH OTHER SO WE DON'T CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT. WE PLAY DIFFERENT ROLES, IF HE'S PLAYING RHYTHM AND I'M PLAYING LEAD, THEN THE ROLES REVERSE"



“IT ALL COMES BACK TO WHAT’S RIGHT FOR THE SONG. I’LL LISTEN TO WHAT JERRY IS PLAYING AND I’LL TRY NOT TO GET IN HIS WAY. IF I’M TAKING A SOLO THEN I’M JUST GOING TO DIVE IN THE DEEP END AND TRUST HIM TO KEEP IT TOGETHER”

JD: "That's when it gets really exciting, when you leave the page and there's no more thinking about what we did yesterday. That's gone. Today's a different story. The key to what we do is listening to each other so we don't cancel each other out. We play different roles, if he's playing rhythm and I'm playing lead, then the roles reverse…"
TE: "In the blink of an eye."
JD: "Yeah, it can happen fast. But I've never played with anyone where we automatically had a rapport like Tommy and I have. It's an amazing thing to me."

Both Emmanuel and Douglas have forged international careers as lead players as much as accompanists, and while the two disciplines may seem at odds, the approach remains the same.
TE: "It all comes back to what's right for the song. I'll listen to what Jerry is playing and I'll try not to get in his way. If I'm taking a solo then I'm just going to dive in the deep end and trust him to keep it together.

"When we're playing a tune like *Chocktaw Hayride*, which goes along at a hell of a clip, I know that he doesn't need me doing all sorts of stuff underneath him, so I just play like I'm a bass player and a chop player on the mandolin, and then he can do whatever he wants over the top. But that has to be consistent and that's right for that song.

"Then when we do a song like [Springsteen's] *I'm On Fire*, I kind of open it out and he just does what he wants. We've never discussed it. 'Will I play there? Will you do that?' He takes it and then I let him know I'm coming in with the vocal."

ABOVE Both masters of their respective crafts, Jerry and Tommy have come together to perform on the Transatlantic Sessions – a long-running tour that brings together some of the finest folk musicians from around the world

JD: "There's a lot of eye contact, but listening is the most important thing. I can hear him ramping down getting ready for something else to take over, and I can hear him ramping up, too. I know when it's about time to hand it off – here he comes regardless!

"Tommy's such an energetic player – but it's energetic substance. There are a lot of people that can play a lot of notes with a lot of flash but they don't have anything to do with what's in front of you. We're trying to write a story at the same time. That's the way I view music, like painting or writing. You can't just give them licks. That's boring – and it goes nowhere."

TE: "If you're going to call yourself a musician, you've got to take the listener somewhere. Tell me a story, move me. That's what we're trying to do. When we first met, I had him come over to my place and I played him some songs because I wanted his input from a producer's point of view. Normally, I do everything myself, but I trust Jerry."

JD: "I just started hearing lyrics over all these beautiful cinematic guitar landscape songs and asked Tommy how he would feel about someone writing some lyrics and singing these songs. What I didn't know at the time was that, when Tommy writes a song, he also writes lyrics that no-one ever hears. There's this actual internal dialogue going on underneath what he is playing. He is a great communicator with his guitar but there is more happening than a lot of people are really able to appreciate. It's something that most players just wouldn't even think to do. I do a similar thing actually. I sometimes write short stories and then I write a song around each one before I even have a melody."

Playing in a guitar-based duo can be challenging, and there's more to active listening than just waiting for the other guy to stop playing. Another vital element is being aware of the frequencies you take up.

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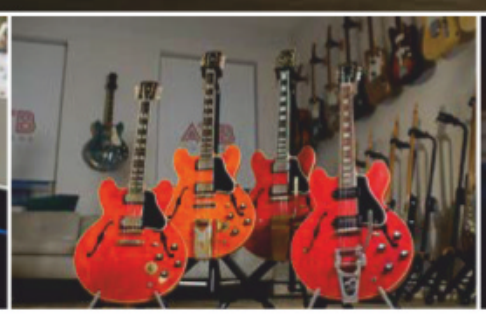

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"I RECORDED THE ALBUM IN THREE DAYS. THAT'S 26 TRACKS!"

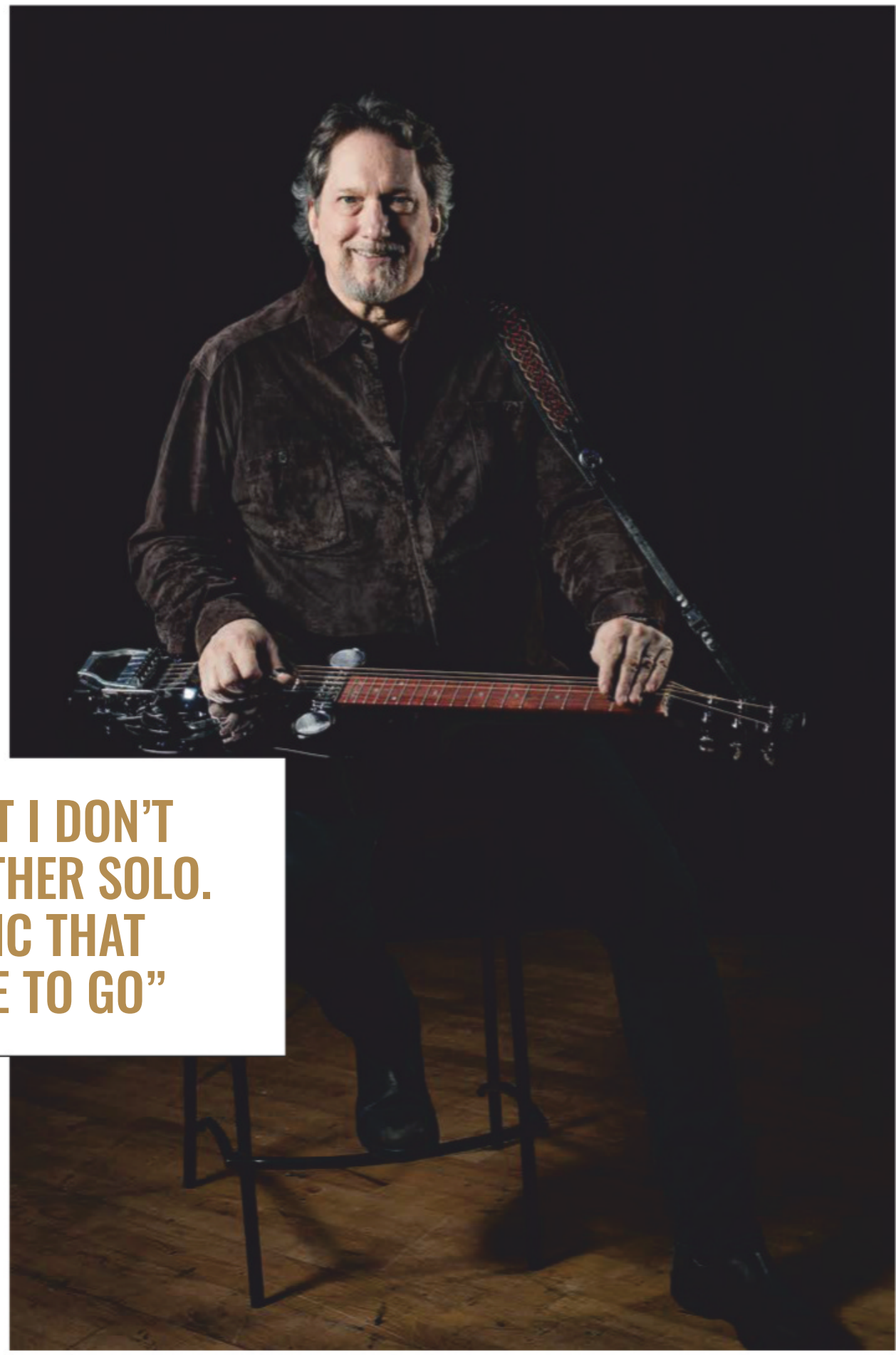
ABOVE Tommy has long been an ambassador for Maton, and has an entire signature range designed in conjunction with the Australian brand

ABOVE RIGHT Emmanuel recently recorded a career-spanning look back at some of his favourite original songs with engineer Rory Rositas (pictured). Head to *Guitar.com* to find out more about *The Best Of Tommysongs*

TE: "He's all the midrange, completely. It's a sweet midrange but if he wants it to growl and to hit you, it will. It's all in his touch. So I look for ways to explore other frequencies and listen for changes in dynamics and all the subtle things he does. I remember all those thousands of road miles I spent listening to Alison Krauss and Union Station, listening to Jerry's playing – all the subtleties, even just the sound of his slide moving is musical, that's all part of it. You've got to hear every detail otherwise you're playing too much."
JD: "You know, there are a lot of people on stage with the Transatlantic Sessions and I always say, 'If you can't hear the main part then you're playing too much or too loud. Back off! When it's your turn, then we're going to focus on you and support you.' You can ruin a beautiful song by playing more than necessary – coming out of nowhere with a Mixolydian jazz scale run during a beautiful angelic vocal is a quick way to do that."
TE: "Putting the song first. That's so important."

Tommy has done just that with his upcoming album, *The Best of Tommysongs*, which mixes brand-new material with mature and expressive takes on fan favourites. Despite the complexity of the music, it was created in an eye-openingly short period.
TE: "I recorded the album in three days. That's 26 tracks!"
JD: "Wow, you are familiar with those songs!"
TE: "Well I wrote them! I wanted some reworked versions of those songs, which have developed somewhat since they were first written. The album has 24 songs and I recorded a couple of bonus tracks ready for different promotions. There are six new songs, which I wrote last year. Then I sat down and chose some songs like *Endless Road*, *Angelina* and others from the *Only* album, which was my first real solo acoustic album outside of Australia.

"You know, I signed away the rights to that first record in perpetuity and now that the material has evolved and I honestly feel I'm playing it so much better and can do a better job sound-wise, so I wanted to set a new baseline for the recording."
JD: "Songs go through a metamorphosis; you really don't know a song when you first record it. You don't know it personally, you have to live with it on the road and it will grow and evolve and surprise you."
TE: "We also change and get a different view of the world. When I listen to my playing from 20 or 30 years ago, it's like I had tunnel vision, and now my worldview is more open and I have a wealth of life experience to draw on. I'm a lot less afraid to try things and happier to trust my instincts, especially when it comes to trusting feeling over technique."



“I’VE PLAYED SO MUCH THAT I DON’T CARE IF I NEVER PLAY ANOTHER SOLO. I JUST WANT TO PLAY MUSIC THAT GIVES PEOPLE SOMEWHERE TO GO”

Though well known for his use of acoustic resonator guitars built by Paul Beard, Douglas has found the Transatlantic Sessions a perfect environment for experimenting with new textures.

JD: “I keep a lap steel over here in the UK, which was built by Jason DuMont of Lap King Guitars. Plus, a fellow gave me one in Liverpool a few years ago and in the whole ruckus I didn’t get his name, and then just this year I found out who it was. It’s a Palfray guitar with a P-90, and that goes straight into a volume pedal, then the delay, then into the Paul Cochrane Timmy, then another delay, and then right into the amp.

“So, the delay goes into the distortion, which is wrong but totally right – I’m distorting the whole sound as it hits the amp. That guitar is particularly well suited to the acoustic. It’s a little darker with a more rounded sound but a haunting high-end. It’s another way to support and accent the substance of the song or a particular lyric. With all that sustain and then the overdrive pedal, we have some songs where I’m flooring the pedal and it’s useful when it’s time to make a statement.

“I’m using a Paul Cochrane Timmy pedal. I’ve gone through all kinds of distortions and overdrives. I don’t like reverb very much. I prefer delay – or two delays. So what I’m doing with the lap steel is not soloing so much as supporting. It’s just texture stuff, which is really fun for me.

“I’m sort of the guinea pig for the dobro world anyway. I’m the first guy that gets the new strange-shaped bar or pickup. I worked with Fishman for a long time on a pickup, and now I’ve got this Hipshot bridge on the guitar so I can instantly change tunings. Regular tuning is GBDGBD but you throw this open and you’re in D, which gives a more bluesy feel than it does bluegrass or country. It takes you from one mindset to another.

“I’ve played so much that I don’t care if I never play another solo. I just want to support people, to play music that gives them somewhere else to go.”

TE: “As far as the dobro is concerned, Jerry has pretty much defined where it’s going for the next couple of hundred years, so I think the instrument is safe!”

While anything that works with the song is fair game in the studio, Maton guitars are still Emmanuel’s first choice for live work.

ABOVE Jerry Douglas’s signature BlackBeard acoustic resonator is helping him provide the slide on tour, but he also uses a Lap King Guitars lap steel that he keeps in the UK

Beard

TE: "This is a Traditional cutaway model. It's the first one that Maton made and it's a relatively new shape, which is deeper and wider across the lower bout. I keep the neck really straight, so if I hit it hard it will buzz, but when I play you won't hear any of that over the PA. It's as clear as a bell. It has a hybrid mic-piezo pickup system too, which I blend. This is a really great guitar for drop-D and G tunings, too.

"I could do the whole show on just one guitar but I don't want to be tuning onstage and I think it's good for our ears to have different sounds. When I'm doing my own shows, I have three guitars: one in drop-D; my main guitar, in standard tuning; and the third has big strings on it and is tuned to drop-D but a whole tone lower – so it's drop-C, which gives me a chance to have a whole different frequency range."

JD: "It's a totally different voice."

TE: "Keeping the right amount of midrange is so important – and don't hit that bass too hard! Lots of players are scooping the mids and that means the bass swamps the hell out of their sound. Using a feedback buster makes a difference too. I leave the sound hole covered, crank the pickup and I'm good to go."

JD: "Everything all the way up. Does it go to 12?"

TE: "I'd put it there if it did."

JD: "I think we all carry an ideal sound around with us. No matter what guitar we pick up, it's going to sound like us."

TE: "Yeah, the sound is in us and we're trying to make that sound on any guitar we play."

JD: "I feel like the Matons are a bit of a blank canvas for you. They give you all you need to put your personality on them and then you can take the music wherever it needs to go. If you were playing a big J-200 or something, you'd start out with a much different sound but sooner or later, you would make that *your* sound.

"People say, 'I like you because I can tell it's you in three notes,' so that's the thing, not what kind of guitar you're playing, but what kind of sound you create with your instrument."

Emmanuel is often one of the first names to be mentioned when it comes to the philosophical meandering 'is it the player or the guitar?', but he has little enthusiasm for online discussions.

TE: "I very rarely buy into online debates. I'm just too honest for that sort of thing and sometimes you have to burst someone's bubble, someone who's been told something that simply isn't true and has lived their life by it. I remember someone writing on a Chet Atkins forum about Chet's guitars, 'He only played this, he never played that…' I lived at his house and I saw him play a Kay Kraft because he loved it. He didn't get a Gretsch guitar out of the case once the whole time I was with him. He had a Telecaster with a B-Bender, all sorts of things. He had a Martin D-41 and a Gibson that was made esspecially for him.

"MY MAIN AMBITION IS TO GET GOOD! I WANT TO BE A GOOD MUSICIAN. IT'S A LEARNING PROCESS THAT NEVER ENDS. IF YOU STOP LEARNING, THEN YOU MIGHT AS WELL QUIT"

"He'd keep those two guitars downstairs, but I'd come down and find him playing my Maton while he had his breakfast in the morning. He just loved the feel of it. But people don't always like it when you tell them the truth. Before you know it, it's suddenly World War III."

While worldwide travel has its joys, maintaining a sense of routine and dedicating time to practice can be a challenge.

TE: "I like those days where I just play tunes all day or jam with other people and make music. That's fun. But there's another side, where the discipline comes in and you have to say, 'Today I'm only going to play with a metronome and tomorrow I'm going to work on my strength.' It's not always the same routine."

JD: "When you're travelling, you can't really play until you get to the show and make sure your hands are talking to each other."

"I LOVE THE SPONTANEITY OF WORKING WITH JERRY. WE'LL TRY ANYTHING AND SOMETIMES IT WORKS – AND SOMETIMES IT REALLY DOESN'T"

TE: "Sometimes when we're touring in America, we have a sleeper bus where we have our own beds, and I usually spend a good part of the day up the back of the bus playing songs, especially if I'm out with Frank [Vignola] and Vinnie [Raniolo]. Those guys love to play all the time, so we'll get in there and run through everything we're playing on stage that night, and then we'll jam some Charlie Christian tunes or whatever. Every day is an education, too. It really gets your blood going."

With both men having already achieved so much in their careers, what plans and aspirations do they have for the future?

JD: "My main ambition is to get good! I want to be a good musician. It's a learning process that never really ends. If you stop learning, then you might as well quit – and then you're going to be unhappy."

TE: "To answer that question from the perspective of the Tom and Jerry show, I think our next thing is to get some more songs together and rework some of the ones we already play. I was talking to Jerry about *Chocktaw Hayride*. We played it last night and it tore up and the people had a great time, but it was over before we knew it. It's only two-and-a-half-minutes long so we're going to take some longer solos.

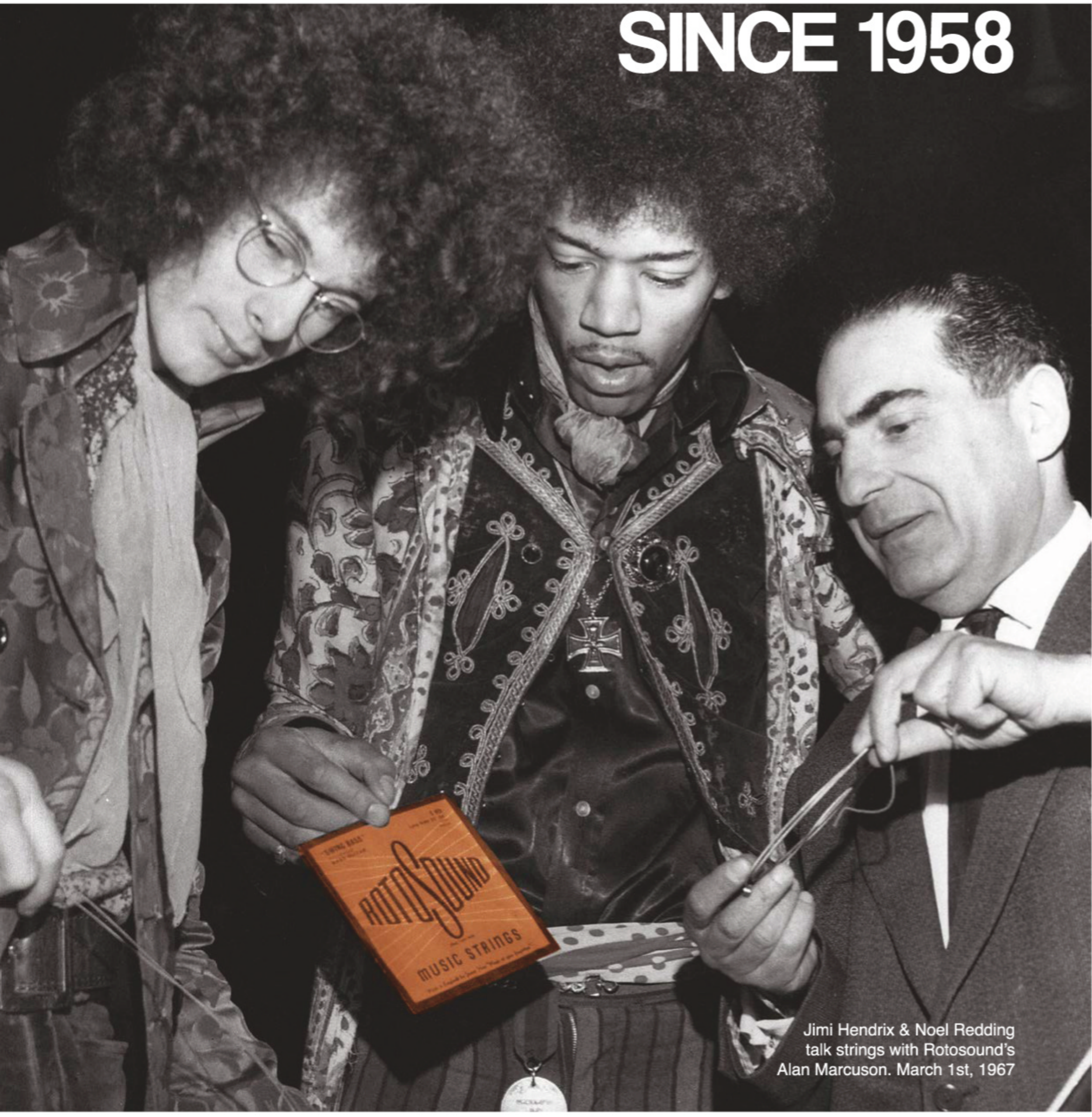
"That's the next thing we'll be working on. We've only been a duo for a little while and we are both so busy. The tour that we're planning in the UK is keeping us focused."

JD: "I keep listening to Tommy's albums and thinking, 'I could play on that!' But I have to pull back because that's his solo part of the show. So we need to write songs together too, because I love the way he writes and plays."

TE: "I love the spontaneity of working with Jerry. We'll try anything and sometimes it works – and sometimes it really doesn't."

JD: "A good trainwreck can be a beautiful thing. You can't take your eyes off it while it's happening. The audience is thinking, 'Oh, they've done it now. There's no coming back from that'. But we always find an escape route!"

MAKING HISTORY SINCE 1958



Jimi Hendrix & Noel Redding
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THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

PORTRAIT JOE CULTICE

Joe Satriani is not a player to rest on his laurels, even after a glittering career at the forefront of shred guitar. As he prepares to unveil his genre-hopping 18th studio album *Shapeshifting*, we catch up with the man himself to talk technique, tone, ego, and why his fingers don't feel as young as they used to

For the best part of 40 years, Joe Satriani has been a standard-bearer for shred guitar, and a player whose astounding chops have set the benchmark for generations of artists who have been influenced by his style.

Despite this tremendously impressive legacy, Satch has never been one to hang back, or be content to bask in his not inconsiderable successes. In addition to 17 studio albums and countless world tours, Satriani's career has taken in dep stints with iconic artists as diverse as Deep Purple and Mick Jagger. He also created the G3 concert tour franchise, founded the supergroup Chickenfoot and plenty more besides.

As he approaches his 64th birthday (yes, Joe Satriani is 63 years old – no, we can't believe it either), what is there left for him to achieve, and what is there left to inspire him? The answer is *Shapeshifting*, his new studio album, which sees him tackle a bevy of new genre-fluid tracks that might make up his most diverse album ever.

It's a project that finds Satch as energised and enthusiastic as he was back in 1987 – when his iconic *Surfing With The Alien* album made him a superstar – with a humility that belies his status as one of the most influential guitarists of his generation.

What's the meaning behind the album's title?

"It's tied to this theme of me putting myself through stylistic shifts – dramatic ones – and sort of surrendering myself to each one of the songs without any regard for past forays into different styles or accomplishments or technique or anything. So, whatever the song I wrote was, I would just become the right guitar player for that song."

One song that stands out is *Teardrops*. There's a lot of space and you can really hear each instrument individually.

"I create these demos in my home studio using Pro Tools – everything is laid out, 99 per cent of the arrangement is set. That way, when we go to track, the musicians can hear all six of my other guitar and keyboard parts, and because there are no lyrics for them to hang onto, they can track knowing that I'm going to be doing this melody, that harmony, this little ear-candy bit, and they can create their part around that, which makes it easier for me to get the best out of them.

"But for that particular track, we actually turned more things off because of Kenny [Aaronoff]'s drum sound. He did such a beautiful job that when we heard the sound of his kick drum, we decided to make sure it could be heard all by itself. It's a song that has a bit of an odd meter trick to it – on the one hand you can just think of it as a waltz but, on the other, it's in 7/8 and in 6/8. So it's a bit tricky but it should just sound emotional; that's the whole idea behind the song."

© Scott Dudelson / Getty Images

It's interesting to hear you talk about how you demo in such detailed ways – your solos often sound composed, going all the way back to *Surfing With The Alien*.

"The only one that was really composed on *Surfing* was *Crushing Day*, and that's because it was so long and repetitive, I thought I'd better plan something out. And I regretted it, because I don't find joy in repeating something that was worked out. I find joy in trying to capture something that was spontaneous, over and over again. Take *Flying In A Blue Dream*, that track is so spontaneous. It's got so many problems in it but it has this charm. Every time I play it, it's so much fun to sort of wrestle with the issues – that I feel like I can now solve – but still maintain the charm of it.

"I always liked the contrast between how British rock players would go right to the edge of the cliff and then take one step back, and how American players go right to the edge of the cliff and then fall off and say, 'Come on, join me crashing and burning!'

Satch giving his whammy bar a workout during the 2018 High Tide Beach Party in Huntington Beach, California

"Now, I appreciate both sides of that, but there are times when I go to improvise where I'll just say to myself, 'Remember to take one step back, Joe'. Then you wind up with something that sounds spontaneous. It may not be the show-off track but it's the track that has you keeping it together. From Clapton to Brian May, they always keep it together, and at the same time they're wowing you. It's exciting, it's beautiful but they don't show you how they crash and burn."

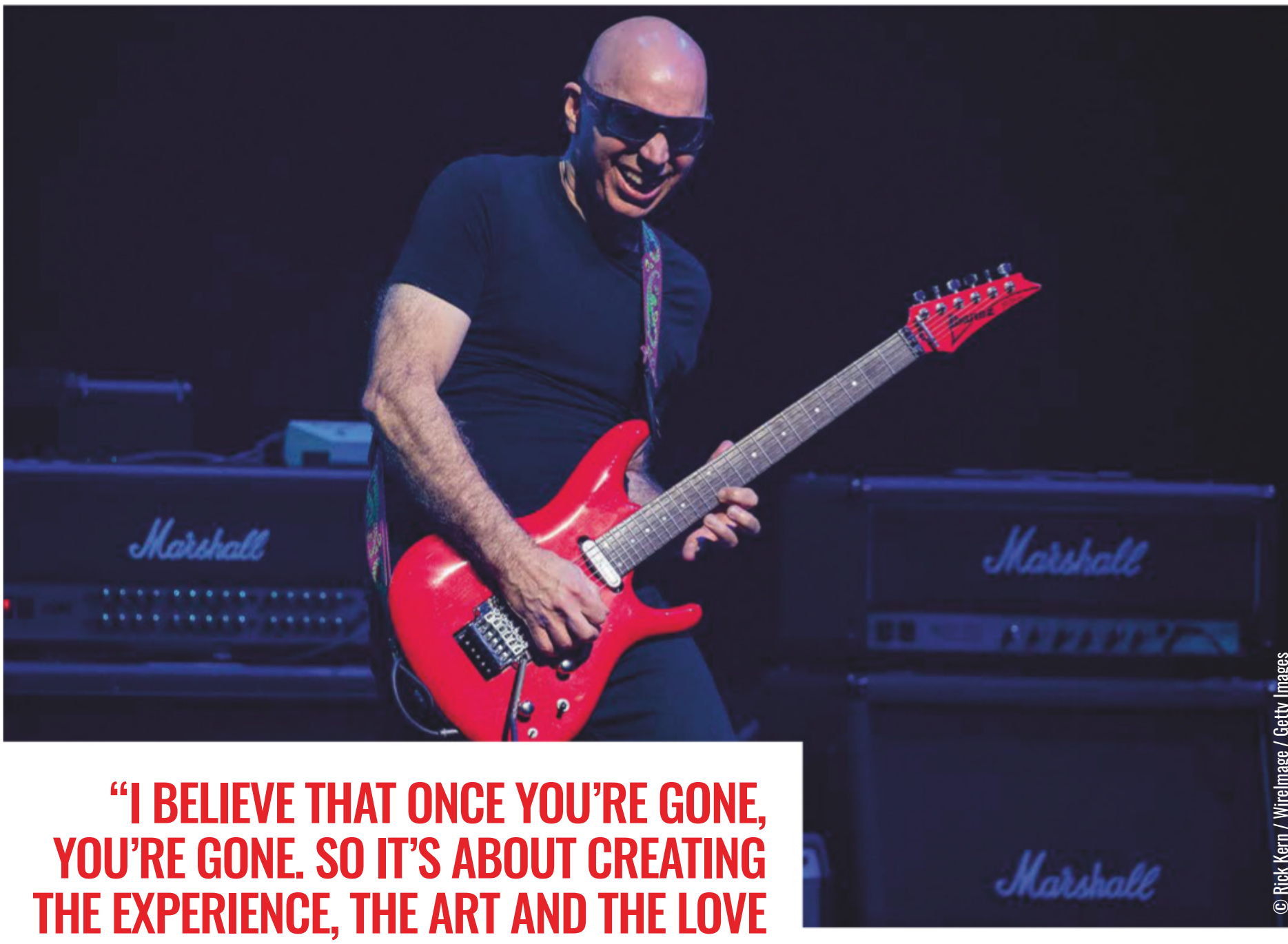
When you look at how your playing has changed during your career, how do you feel you've evolved?

"I love to move on and, after I play something, I don't really analyse it. I like to keep moving forward and keep finding new cathartic experiences to dive into. I know that, on the one hand, I have more control over more techniques now than I did when I was younger, but I'll be 64 in July and I can definitely feel it. My fingers felt quite different when I was 21 to how they feel now; that's just nature taking its course.

"There are so many lessons you learn if you are lucky enough to hang around for a while and keep doing what you're doing. So, when I listen to the early records, I just hear this young and inexperienced kid – but he's very enthusiastic. But I've realised the songs would have been so much better if I'd known they could have been shorter, or should have been longer, or should have used a different amp or different guitar or whatever."

What advice would you give to that young Joe, or indeed any young musician?

"When you're young, you want information that you can apply immediately and be recognised for. 'How can I play faster? How can I be more impressive?' Well, someday you'll be 45 and your fingers will hurt because you played too much when you were 18.



© Rick Kern / WireImage / Getty Images

Satriani flanked by Marshalls in Austin, Texas, during 2019's Experience Hendrix Tour

"I BELIEVE THAT ONCE YOU'RE GONE, YOU'RE GONE. SO IT'S ABOUT CREATING THE EXPERIENCE, THE ART AND THE LOVE WHILE YOU'RE HERE. THERE'S NO REWARD, YOU DON'T GET A MEDAL AT THE END – AS A MATTER OF FACT YOU DROP DEAD!"

You could have been much faster had you just played 45 minutes a day and not killed yourself. But that's something that doesn't really get through to teenage kids who want to take over the world."

Looking back on your career, what would you say has been your proudest achievement so far?

"It's funny – I'm haunted by that question because it was once asked to me while I was on a panel I'd been was invited to, along with Tom Morello, Steve Vai, Steve Lukather, Trevor Rabin and a few other people. We're all sitting on this stage and the audience is asking us questions, and one of them is, 'What are you most proud of?' And I instantly think, 'Oh, I *hate* that question.'

"So they started on the other side of the stage and everyone is saying stuff like, 'Oh my kids', 'the guitar I designed', 'this song that I won an award for'". But when they got to me, I said something that I regret. I said, 'Y'know what, I totally agree with everybody here: they should be proud of everything they just said. But I just want to say it's really dangerous for a musician to be proud of themselves because it just ruins your drive.'"

Why do you regret saying that?

"I suppose I was just speaking the truth – and that's not always a good idea. I could feel it in the room and then I realised, 'Steve's gonna kill me.' Both of them: Vai and Lukather! they're just going to pummel me when I get back and say, 'Why'd you say that?!'"

With that in mind, it doesn't seem like you're concerned with legacy as much as you are with staying creative and enthused by your work.

"I truly believe that. I believe that once you're gone, you're gone. Really, it's about creating the experience, the art and the love while you're here. There's no reward, you don't get a medal at the end – as a matter of fact you drop dead at the end! I like to turn to the people at the clinics and say, 'Wake up, everybody, this is it! It's not happening tomorrow, it's happening right this second!'

"When I walk into my room and pick up a guitar, I tell myself that *now* is the time to play something good, to write about what Joe is experiencing right now, and share it with people. Whether they like it or not doesn't matter; while they're busy critiquing it, I'll just start writing and playing another piece of music. It's a funny way of dealing with it. Sammy Hagar always says the reason I'm not rich and famous like him is because I have no ego, and sometimes I go, 'You know, you're right'. I should drink from the Sammy Hagar cup once in a while!"

Joe Satriani's new album *Shapeshifting* is out 10 April on Sony Music/Legacy Recordings

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ESTATE

AGENTS

After five albums and a decade in the industry, what more do Real Estate have to say? Martin Courtney and Alex Bleeker discuss the importance of making art, playing well with others, and not being pegged as a 'reverb band'

WORDS SAM ROBERTS **PHOTOS** JAKE MICHAELS

"The question is, why?" says Real Estate bass player Alex Bleeker, as we discuss the band's new album *The Main Thing*. "Why are we doing this?" It's a pertinent question to ask – after all, he's about to head to out and soundcheck for an acoustic showcase, during which he'll tease songs from their fifth album alongside frontman and lead songwriter Martin Courtney.

"We were wondering whether we would do it at all," says Bleeker. "I think we always knew we wanted to make another album – but why? What does it mean to make an album in this context? We discovered that it motivated us to make something that we thought was as good as we could possibly make it, that was meaningful to us and that could maybe be meaningful to other people."

Courtney, Bleeker's bandmate of more than a decade, listens intently before politely interjecting. "I think our music has, hopefully, become more complex as we've become more complex as people. With this record in particular, it really felt like we had come to a fulcrum in our career as a band. It felt like something we had to take more seriously."

The sincerity on *The Main Thing* is discernible from the get-go. Things have changed for the group over the past 10 years. They have developed from a college indie band into well-respected veterans of the scene, with five consistent and well-crafted guitar-driven LPs to their name.

The new album sees them both discover and attempt new ideas and approaches, as a result of a number of changes to both their collective and personal lives. Courtney became a father at about the same time founding member Matt Mondanile left the group, and Julian Lynch joined the line-up just in time to play a pivotal role on *In Mind*, another entry in Real Estate's exemplary back catalogue. An album that happened to provide us with one of the best guitar riffs of the last decade – the undulating picked intro to *Darling*. Lynch's integration into the fold was seamless, and he even penned and sang on the track *Also A But*, from the new record.

LET'S GET TOGETHER

Now a more stable and tight-knit outfit, the band found the courage to embrace external collaboration on this LP, heard immediately in the lead single *Paper Cup*, which features Amelia Meath of Sylvan Esso on backing vocals. Other collaborations come in the form of Matt Barrick of The Walkmen, and Aaron Johnston of Brazilian Girls, alongside a plethora of new musical influences, culminating in the inclusion of a string quartet.

"A lot of that came by way of our producer," says Courtney. "I never really saw us as the type of band that would collaborate with outside musicians. I just felt like all the sounds on the records would come from the five members of the band, so I was actually kind of resistant to even putting strings on a song.

ABOVE Real Estate performing on stage during New York Public Radio Live at Brooklyn Bowl in 2019

FACING PAGE (L-R) Julian Lynch (guitar), Martin Courtney (guitar and vocals), Alex Bleeker (bass and vocals), Jackson Pollis (drums), Matt Kallman (keyboards)

"We hired Jane Scarpantoni, who's an accomplished string arranger. She did an incredible job at just complementing the songs. She's super old-school and she handwrites all the parts – she doesn't use a computer! I didn't hear anything before the day that we were in the studio with the strings. I was hearing those parts for the first time as they were being played. It was a bit of a shock but I loved them."

As Courtney alludes, the inclusion of Kevin McMahon, who produced the band's 2011 album *Days*, really pushed Real Estate to write and record with a new sense of creativity and purpose. "Kevin wanted to push us into doing things that maybe we hadn't done before, or may have made us uncomfortable," says Courtney.

Bleeker, on the other hand, saw this renewed rapport with McMahon as a way to further develop the band's musicianship. "That's growth, trusting people besides yourself to come in and offer a new perspective. It's a good thing to do to make a new kind of record, to turn to others for perspective and help. It's cool to build a community of musicians around you. It helps make a greater record."

What with it being only Lynch's second full-length with the band, his guitar sound caught McMahon by surprise. "He and Kevin went to war a bit because he uses very small picks and very heavy gauge strings," says Bleeker. "He talks about wanting to sound like a synthesiser and a human voice.

"I think Kevin was thrown off by it because it's a totally different guitar sound to what he recorded with us on *Days*. He was like, 'Why are you doing this?' and Julian was like, 'I'm doing this because I thought about it so much.' Then Kevin was immediately like, 'Holy shit, okay that's the guitar sound!'"

THE THING IS

The ethos during the recording process of *The Main Thing* brings us right back to the band's collective mindset when setting out to write the album. After performing and writing records for more than a decade, alongside young families and the like, did they really believe they had more to say?

As Courtney says, the title track – which was the last one to be penned – says it all. "The song *The Main Thing* kind of encapsulates it, intentionally trying to make a super-overblown pop song and then also have a very tight and specific message within that song.

"In a tongue-in-cheek kind of way," he says, "when your life feels really complex and overwhelming and you start to feel, from a personal perspective, like maybe being a musician and making indie-rock records is not the most responsible thing to be doing when you've got three kids, the best thing to do is double down and keep going."

Bleeker agrees, noting that the responsible thing isn't necessarily the most appropriate. "What's beautiful about that message is quite candidly having those thoughts and then saying and discovering, 'I need to set a different kind of example for my children,' which is that they should follow their passion totally to the end. Sometimes doing the responsible thing is soulless and awful – and that can be irresponsible."

“OUR LAST RECORD WAS SO CLEAN OR TIGHT OR DRY, WHICH WAS ALMOST A REACTION TO BEING PEGGED AS THIS ‘REVERB BAND’. I WANTED TO MAKE A MESSIER-SOUNDING ALBUM”

“Totally,” says Courtney. “It was also coming from a more broad social and environmental thing. We’re sitting here making art but how much are we really benefitting the world by what we’re doing? I guess the answer to that is to make art that’s important and, as Alex has been saying, touring, bringing people together is a special thing that we get to do. Creating the community is a good thing.”

Though they cover some arduous and adult topics on their latest long-player, the guitar tones and melodies are still reminiscent of Real Estate’s signature warmth.

Despite having an instantly recognisable tone, Courtney admits that he doesn’t really put much consideration into his guitar sounds. “My thing hasn’t changed that much over the years. It’s chimey. I use Telecasters a lot in the studio and, although I used a ’65 reissue Jaguar on this record, it’s still clean for the most part. On certain songs, I was trying to overdrive the amps just a bit, but that’s the most evolution that I’ve made over the years – to use smaller amps and try to crank it and get a bit of warmth and distortion out of it.”

Bleeker believes that the key to Real Estate’s guitar sound is more in the melodies and compositions rather than the guitar tones themselves, which allows him to fulfil a more frontal role as a bass player than in most contemporary rock outfits. “I think a lot of the basslines are kind of counterpointed melodies. That’s another fun thing about this band. You’ve got two guitars doing it but you’ve also got the bass doing it and also the keyboards doing it, to a certain degree. There is a focus on melody for me there. And then from that I’ve gotten sort of obsessed with different nerdy basses and effects.

“Dave [Hartley] from The War On Drugs got me onto this line of basses from the Fender Fullerton era. I’m not that knowledgeable but it was during the process of moving the factory to Corona or whatever. Basically, it was the first time that they made reissue guitars. It was 1982 to ’85 in Fullerton, California. So, I have one of the very first 1950s P-Bass reissues. I played it on the entire record.”

It’s no surprise a band as meticulous as this set of New Jersey natives is willing to try new things. With each new album, Real Estate seem to develop in complex and rounded ways. “Our last record was so clean or tight or dry,” says Courtney, “which was almost a reaction to being pegged as this ‘reverb band’. I wanted to make a messier-sounding album or something that felt more dense.”

With no plans to return to being a ‘reverb band’ just yet, *The Main Thing* saw Real Estate dissect their writing process and spend more time on each element. The result might be their best record yet. G

***The Main Thing* is out now on Domino Records**

IN THE MOMENT

From *Curb Your Enthusiasm* to *The Goldbergs* and his latest Netflix comedy special, *Our Man In Chicago,* Jeff Garlin has been splitting sides onscreen for decades. We visit him at home in Los Angeles to find out about his biggest offscreen passions: guitars and music

WORDS MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

When you head out to interview somebody, walk up to their front door and pluck up the courage to knock, it's a lot like waiting in line for a rollercoaster. But on this occasion, our trepidation is dispelled when the door swings open and we're greeted by the friendly, familiar face of Jeff Garlin, and welcomed into his Mulholland home.

You may know Garlin from any number of beloved TV and film projects. There's long-running sitcom *The Goldbergs*, acclaimed cult comedy *Arrested Development*, Pixar smashes *Wall-E* and *Toy Story 4*, and then of course there's *Curb Your Enthusiasm* – one of the most beloved TV shows in history, now in its 10th season, in which Garlin plays the manager of a perpetually obtuse Larry David. What you may not know about Garlin, however, is that he is a huge fan and student of the guitar.

At Garlin's side is Sage, his constant cockapoo companion, who happens to be a TV star in her own right, having played the part of *The Goldbergs*' pet Lucky from season three onwards. "She's a bigger star than I am," says Jeff.

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1 Garlin calls his prized polka-dot Buddy Guy Stratocaster – signed by Guy himself at his Chicago nightclub – his 'TV guitar' because he plays it while watching the box

2 Jeff's gorgeous Gibson L-5 is one of his 'bedroom guitars' and provides a connection to one of his favourite jazz players: Wes Montgomery

Equal parts boisterous and gregarious, Garlin is excited to chat about comedy and guitars, as well as a few deeper and more philosophical subjects. His recent Netflix comedy special is entitled *Our Man In Chicago* but, although the actor and stand-up was born in the Windy City, Jeff's musical epiphany actually occurred much further south.

You grew up in Chicago, a big music town.
"Yes but I moved to Florida in the 1970s when I was 12, so I was around the radio. My favourite music was R&B, like Marvin Gaye, Al Green and Earth, Wind & Fire."

You were around when Tom Petty was happening.
"I discovered Petty from the movie *FM*, the song was *Breakdown*. I love Tom Petty. I became a security guard for rock concerts – Tom Petty was on tour, I believe with Nick Lowe or Rock Pile – and my job when the girls ran on stage was *not* to throw them off, but move them. I've since become friendly with Mike Campbell and pretty good friends with Benmont Tench. I had him on my podcast a few years ago. I love that."

Did you ever connect with Tom?
"I'm friends with [Petty's wife] Dana Petty but I never met Tom. I found out later what a huge *Curb* fan he was. I would have loved to have met him. He's really special to me."

Growing up and moving around, was music important to you?
"Hugely important to me. I have a very high reference level with jazz, blues, rock and R&B. But I don't really have much of a reference level for anything past the mid-2000s."

Who were your key musical influences?
"Musically, my influences – which have totally affected my comedy, by the way – are John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Bill Evans, Sunny Rollins, Wes Montgomery and Grant Green.

"Truly, I'm an improviser in stand-up, and I'll be an improviser when I'm good enough in music. In terms of what I do, it's all blues. It's *all* blues. I'd say John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, and Buddy Guy, my hometown hero."

Your comedy *feels* like the blues. It has a beginning, middle and end, with plenty of room to riff in between.

3

3 Jeff clearly has a thing for sunburst guitars, and when they look like this gorgeous '59 ES-330, frankly who can blame him?

"I look at myself as a Chicago bluesman – I do. That's how I approach my work. I'm inspired by Buddy Guy. As a matter of fact, the phrase that I use is 'living the blues through comedy'."

So there's plenty of room for tangents, mistakes?

"Oh, mistakes are beautiful. You know what else is beautiful? Lulls. Let's just be quiet here for a second. Just be present. That's how I improvised so much in my Netflix special, I was just present. I don't know what the fuck's going on!

"Don't try to hide mistakes! Who wants perfection, you know? I don't. It's all about being okay with a moment that's human, being okay with things being not quite perfect. I really aspire to that. I think I have *moments* of brilliance and I probably have *moments* of perfection. But most of what I do is not really in the land of perfection."

So when it comes to music, what moves you?

"Kingfish hits me pretty hard. I've been digging a band called Temples, too. My second-favourite rock band is Radiohead, number-one is Spoon. I love Spoon. Every album that Spoon puts out gets better and better. I'm inspired by them.

"I listen to a lot of 1950s jazz, 1950s blues, 1960s and 1970s blues and classic rock – Peter Green, Mike Bloomfield, Eric Clapton, obviously, Keith Richards, Mick Taylor. Oh, and the Irish fellow, Rory Gallagher, I love Rory. I'm open to new bands and new sounds but not much inspires me."

You're on Instagram. Do you follow anyone who inspires you?

"Kingfish! Him, I follow. Jared James Nichols, he's a pal. He's been here playing guitars. The best player I have ever seen in my life is Nathaniel Murphy (@zeppelinbarnatra). I've actually written "fuck you" in his comments.

"I'm friends with different guitarists, I know so many, like Steve Lukather. I've gotten to know Jonny Greenwood. Tom Morello and I filmed a thing with Vince Vaughn in Chicago. Jerry Cantrell. Conan O'Brien's band leader Jimmy Vivino. He's a pal of mine, an actual pal. Great guy."

You used to be roommates with Conan, who is way into guitar...

"Conan! He's the one who made me appreciate Led Zeppelin, 'cause that's pretty much what he listened to exclusively when we were roommates. What's funny is, he played the later stuff, *Physical Graffiti*.

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4 Garlin's Fender Custom Shop Robert Cray Stratocaster has a Fiesta Red finish

5 This rare '55 factory hardtail Sunburst Strat has been well played over the years

But I was all about *I*, *II* and, to a degree, *III*, because I love the blues. Zeppelin's first album is my favourite, I just love it."

How did you start playing guitar?

"I always loved the guitar and music but I didn't start taking lessons until I did a movie called *Daddy Day Care* in 2003, where I had to look like I knew what I was doing. To tell you the truth, looking back on it now, there's no way I looked like I knew what I was doing. I just gripped the neck but I had no idea. I just strummed. I can't even watch it."

So you learnt on the job?

"Yes. I started taking lessons with a guy called Fast Freddy Rapillo, former guitarist for Rick James. He still teaches me guitar to this day."

How's that going?

"You know, here's the problem I have: my schedule is too busy to allow me to be a really good guitarist. I'll practise, I'll start feeling good about it and then I stop because of filming."

Do you ever take a travel guitar with you on set?

"I did but I'm not going to anymore. I had a parlour guitar in my trailer but I had no time to play it. It served its purpose, and its purpose is to show me I'm not going to play it. You're looking at somebody who's been playing for 12 years and I am as mediocre as any human can be at guitar.

"It was 'Ideal Jeff', who I'm a big fan of, who played guitar in his trailer. I didn't play though – 'Real Jeff' would stare at it and face immense guilt."

Do you ever sit around and jam with anyone else?

"Nope, no one sees me play. I did that with photography, I didn't show anybody any pictures. I think the first time I showed pictures was at the nine-year mark. I wish I could have done that with comedy, where nobody saw me."

It seems like you've taken up guitar collecting.

"I wouldn't say I'm a collector – I have guitars that mean something to me. I think for me, there's always a Blackguard. My dream guitars are 335s and Teles, and I've just fallen in love with a hardtail Strat. I'll never buy a '58, '59, '60 Les Paul, it's too crazy. I won't. Besides, the ones that Gibson makes now are so delightful.

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"My favourite guitar is the one that I use in the special, my '55 Les Paul. Reminds me of Robby Krieger and Neil Young."

Are you looking for a connection to a certain player or just a great guitar?

"Both. It's often a connection to a player and a connection to the guitar. My year is '64. Because of Mike Bloomfield, I would love to get a '64 Tele. I have a '64 Strat, which is what Bob Dylan played when he went electric. But I have to say, the Blackguard is my most valuable guitar. It's all original. For Fender, it's the Blackguards that are the ones that are always going to go up, you won't lose money."

You seem to understand how the guitar market works.

"The market's always up for Les Pauls and Blackguards. There's some strange magic between those two. A '59 ES-335 is always going to be delightful too – and if you have a blonde one? Well, you're fuckin' loaded. That's only going to go up in value. I had a very rare Epiphone Sheraton that was blonde but I didn't keep it. I got rid of it because playing it wasn't bringing me any joy. I don't care about the money so much. It's all about the joy, for me."

So while you're aware of the investment potential, that's not your motivation?

"God, no, not at all to make money. When you invest, you probably won't lose money but my '55 Les Paul, that's a refret. Somebody else made that mistake. I own a '58 Tele that I love and someone refinished it."

So you're not opposed to issues?

"Look, I'm not a nitpicker. If someone else refinishes or refrets, I'm the one who benefits. Because it's still the same magical guitar. I *am* a collector if the instrument sounds good. Generally, guitar collectors don't care how it sounds but to me that's the first thing. I'm not going to buy any old guitar if it's not a good player, a *great* player. For me it's about the playing. I'm going to play them.

"Let's say I get a great deal on a Les Paul and it's all original, perfect shape – if it doesn't sound good then I have no interest. Sound is number one. Number one!"

You mainly stick to Fender and Gibson. What appeals to you about those brands?

"Fenders are tools that are instruments, and Gibson are works of art that are instruments. As much as I love a Blackguard, it really could defend me in a fight.

6 Garlin might not be terribly attached to this 1964 Strat, but it's in sensational condition, with a vivid finish

7 Jeff's Les Paul Goldtop is a Gibson Custom model aged by Tom Murphy

Jeff's dog Sage doesn't seem nearly as impressed as we are by the 1955 Les Paul Custom

8 The ES-335 is one of Jeff's all-time favourite guitars – this '62 model has a special place in his heart

I couldn't defend myself with a 335 but if I'm holding a Strat, you better get the fuck away from me. But as a guitar, there's the same thing. There's an aggressiveness with a Telecaster that you can't get with other guitars."

It's an incisive sound.
"That's why all the punk guys use them. What can't you do with a Tele?!"

Speaking of sounds, we noticed pedals in your practice room.
"I'm experimenting with them to see what I'll keep. The pedals I always use are a Tube Screamer and maybe a wah. I learnt that from watching Buddy Guy. He has the wah and the Tube Screamer and that's it."

We hear you were at NAMM this year but you used a pseudonym.
"Baron Von Hugecock! [Laughs] I used that name in the Steven Soderbergh movie *Full Frontal* with Julia Roberts. We were doing this thing where we were improvising our porn name, made up of your first dog and the street you grew up on. Everyone's doing the porn name, and it comes to me and I say 'Baron Von Hugecock'. Everyone bursts out laughing and I say, 'What? My first dog's name is Baron and I grew up on Hugecock Avenue.'"

Did anything at NAMM blow your mind?
"What blew my mind were the new Gibson Custom Shop models, the wall of Les Pauls, SGs, custom colours. The 335s were remarkable. I love Gibson – the people and the guitars. They contacted me on Instagram and said, "Come visit us". I met with them and they're some of my closest friends now. I was with JC [Curleigh] and Cesar [Gueikian] at NAMM. They refer to me as a Gibson spokesperson – the way they treat me is so kind and thoughtful. But I'm not paid by them, I just want them to succeed.

"They just started the Gibson TV thing and did an interview with me and my J-45. Cesar asked me in one of our interviews, 'What do you want to see from Gibson?' I said, 'I don't give a shit about new tuners, new bridges, I just want to see respect for what you've done'. And that's what I saw from the Custom Shop: they give a shit. There's such great craftsmanship in their guitars. Beautiful instruments.

"The colours are beautiful. There's not one colour that would cause anyone watching the person playing it to call them a tool. The bubblegum-pink SG? I would play that, I thought that was the coolest. But nothing there was douchey."

Did you see that orange Firebird?
"I *saw* it! Oh, beautiful! Look at the way we're talking! This is joy. It's joyful for me."

Joy seems to be a recurring theme.
"Joy is huge. Life is filled with melancholy and darkness – and happiness. When I speak at a college I ask the students, 'What do you look for?' So many of them say they just want to be happy and I say, 'You're going to fail because there are so many days where you're not happy'.

"When you're down, you can look for joy, try to find joy in anything. Reading a book, petting your dog. In the darkest moments, that you can do."

9 Garlin's 1953 Telecaster – in its original red-lined 'poodle' case, no less – is one of the most impressive pieces in his collection

You make a distinction between joy and happiness.

"There is a distinction. Happiness to me is such a temporary thing, it's whimsical whether or not it hits you. Whereas joy, I'm never going to stop enjoying my dog, I'm never going to stop enjoying my 1962 ES-335. At all times, that will bring me joy, but happiness is just so whimsical.

"I can be down and still get joy from my dog. I can be down and still derive joy from my guitars. That's the best part of playing. My joys are comedy, music, and photography."

You just had a gallery opening. That must be a source of joy.

"It is. I will never tell anyone that anything I do is great but I will tell people when I'm proud of it. My stand-up special? Very proud. This photo show? Very proud, very proud of it. So I hope people dig it. I'm going to keep doing more."

Do you see parallels between photography, comedy and music?

"It's the stuff between the notes that separates the greats. In any live art form, I'm just present. I don't think. Thinking gets in the way. If I'm doing a scene and I'm worried about my lines, I'm not going to be as good as when I know my lines inside and out. "The same goes for playing the guitar. If I'm worried about how the song goes, it's not going to go as well as when I do know the song."

What about when it's a bad gig? Do you have any survival tips for musicians?

"First off, any musician should feel better about it than I would, because you play your song and people applaud, even if it's a smattering. For a comedian, when they die, the whole room knows they're dying. At least with musicians, they let you play your song, then you get your smattering and move on.

"There's no comparison as to which is more difficult. And if you're in a band, you're all going through it together. When I stand up there, and I'm improvising and I'm dying, there ain't nowhere to go. I would go into my head and go, 'Okay, the crowd's not digging me, this is not practice. What do I do? What pleases me right now, because I'm clearly not communicating with them?' You have to get to a core place of like, 'I'm going to do good work, I'm going to accomplish things, I'm not going to let the night be a waste and I'm going to bring myself joy here'."

ODE TO JOY

Joy abounds as we wrap up our interview and a grinning Garlin brings out guitar after guitar for our amusement. He begins with his prized polka-dot Buddy Guy Stratocaster, which he calls his "TV guitar". It's the one he idly plays while he's watching television. It also boasts what Jeff considers his favourite neck shape: the soft V.

What makes this playfully finished guitar so special to the Chicago-born comedian is that it was signed by Buddy Guy at his Legends nightclub in the Illinois city. “They pulled it out of the box, he signed it, and do you know what he told me?” says Garlin. “He said, ‘I expect you to play it’. That hangs over me.”

Next, Jeff shows off his recent model Gibson L-5, which is strung with flats and is beautifully ornate. “A work of art,” says Garlin. He calls this his “bedroom guitar” because it lives by his bed, plugged into a hand-wired Fender Champ. “I keep this in my room to play before bed, so I fall asleep with a smile on my face.”

For Garlin, this guitar provides a direct connection to Indiana jazz sensation Wes Montgomery, one of the actor’s favourite players. When asked about his most-loved Montgomery tunes, he can’t help but hedge his bets a bit. “The entire first album – all of it,” he says. “I don’t think I’ve ever turned off Montgomery.”

Jeff’s ’59 ES-330 is another bedroom guitar, and among his most cherished. He also feels that the 330 is something of a sleeper-hit. “Everybody always talks about Casinos because of The Beatles,” he says, “but the ES-330 is the most underpriced for what it is. They’re delightful guitars.”

The binding on this example has faded to a wonderful mellow gold, which sets off the figured sunburst top. The black pickup covers are always a sharp look, and the neck is full in the hand. In fact, the neck is the whole reason Jeff has this one. “The neck is over-sprayed,” he says. “Somebody must have thought it was too worn. But who wins? Me! It takes the price right down.”

Old Stratocasters are always breathtaking, and Garlin’s sunburst ’55 is certainly no exception. What makes this early Strat so special is that it’s a factory hardtail instrument, a rare option for the time. Every note we audition bursts forth with an unusually warm and full character. Acoustically, this guitar is loud. He describes it as “the Stratocaster version of a Telecaster”.

The wear on this Strat’s honey-toned sunburst finish tells a clear story – a story of practised technique and a locked right arm. The edge of the maple fretboard shows the telltale tooth marks of a hard-strummed plectrum, while the body above the neck and middle pickups speaks to some more, let’s say, acrobatic moments. The guitar has been refretted and sports 1960s pickup covers, as well as two replaced tone knobs from the same era.

9 The neck on this Tele shows serious signs of wear. “If I was a pro, I’d totally refret this one and play the fuck out of it,” Jeff says

10 Garlin's sumptuous 1955 Les Paul Custom makes a star appearance not just in his admirable collection but in his recent Netflix special

Two more Stratocasters feature in Garlin's enviable collection. There's a Custom Shop Robert Cray model, which oddly doesn't bear his name. It's a beautiful guitar with a highly figured neck, a '64-style logo, the requisite hardtail bridge, and a Fiesta Red finish. At the time of writing, it happens to be for sale at his favourite shop, Imperial Vintage Guitars in LA.

The other Strat he trots out for us is, as he puts it, "in quite extraordinary condition". This 1964 Stratocaster has a shockingly bright and intact finish; each band of the 'burst is vibrant and in technicolor hues. Its original pickguard has aged to that familiar shade of greenish-tan that's so hard to replicate and, unsurprisingly, has split at the neck-pickup mounting screw due to shrinkage.

Strummed acoustically, the '64 has a mellow response and a noticeably wide neck with very little wear. Even the Brazilian rosewood fretboard shows little in the way of divots. Jeff calls the guitar "delightful" but admits that he's not entirely attached to it. "As much as I love this one, I'd sell it to get something I wanted more," he says. "I'd keep this one forever if Strats prove to be my thing but I'm still discovering. I'm still learning which guitars work best for me."

We breeze past two recent Gibsons, too. There's a Murphy-aged Goldtop and a J-45 Custom, which you can see more of on YouTube, in the Gibson TV series *My First Gibson*. Garlin picked it out at Chicago Music Exchange from a group of three, based on its sound. "It's beautiful and sweet-sounding," he says. "That's good enough for me."

Garlin's '62 ES-335 has a special place in his heart. "There are ones that are personal," he says. "This was on a shelf when I was born. It's not going anywhere." It's in superb condition, retains its original PAF pickups, and boasts Jeff's ideal neck profile.

"I like the '62 neck a lot. It was fat in '59, in '60 it started going down, in '61 they're thin, and in '62 they came back up a little bit."

But the crown jewel of Garlin's guitar arsenal might be his 1953 Fender Telecaster, and he's very careful with its original red-lined 'poodle' case. It's a stunning 100 per cent original guitar. The neck bears the signs of a vigorous player and is missing finish between the strings. The back of the neck is blackened from sweat and oxidisation, as if the former owner changed his oil and went to the gig from the garage. Jeff even has photos of its original owner playing it in a barn.

"Blackguards are my investment collector shit," he admits. "Family investment. If I was a pro, I'd totally refret this one and play the fuck out of it."

Finally, Jeff's 1955 Les Paul Custom makes an appearance, which those of you familiar with his Netflix special will recognise from its end credits, during which Garlin, reclined on his couch, strums to the camera. The Les Paul boasts a staple pickup in the neck and a P-90 in the bridge, and is almost entirely original, save for a refret.

The tuners have been replaced due to deterioration of the buttons but the originals are safely stowed away. The black finish is intricately checked, with a few spots of exposed mahogany on the edge of the body. When we point that out, Jeff cries, "Beautiful! Come on!"

The comedy actor has big plans for the evening, generously hosting a party for Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram's 21st birthday. We take one last opportunity to pet Sage – she is a very good girl – and wish him well on the imminent festivities. Shortly before leaving, we ask Jeff about his preferred string gauge. With a wry smirk, he responds, "I'm Baron Von Ten." G

Follow Jeff Garlin on Instagram: @jeffgarlin

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THE MONEY SHOT

1959 GIBSON ES-330TDC

Rare vintage guitars don't come much rarer than this. The ES-330 was introduced as the successor to the ES-225 in late 1959, by which time Gibson was already moving towards slimmer neck profiles. This example's sumptuously full '59 carve situates it squarely in the first few weeks of the model's production, but wait – it's supposed to be a blonde, right?

Just 82 natural-finished ES-330 models shipped in '59, with this deep cherry red stain only officially available the following year. Red '59s exist but we're talking single digits and hen's incisors here. Throw those factory parallelograms on the fretboard and the crown headstock inlay into the mix and, well, find another one if you can.

The custom truss-rod cover is engraved with the name Heidi Barkentin, believed to have been a client of one Irving Kessler, head honcho of the Hawthorne Guitar Studio in Hawthorne, New York. Kessler ordered a number of custom instruments from the Kalamazoo factory in the late-1950s and early-1960s – many of them in this vivid cherry hue. G

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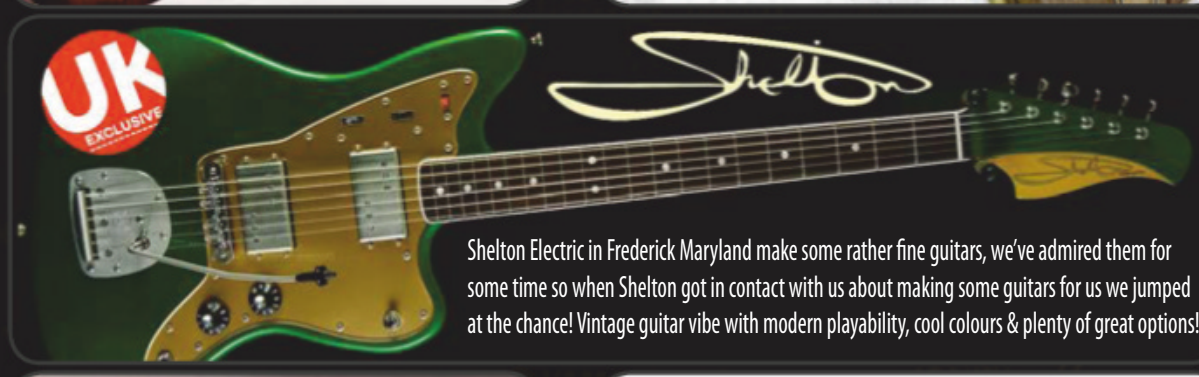

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REVIEWS

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FENDER

PLAYER SERIES LEAD II & LEAD III

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

As Fender reboots its near-forgotten Lead models with some striking colour options, we ask whether these stripped-back strummers are good enough to justify their revival

Rub of the green: the Lead II in all its Neon Green glory

Family function: the Lead II and III's bridges are "functional Fender at its best"

Don't worry, you're not hallucinating – these colours are real. Fender has largely played things straight with its latest not-exactly-classic reissues, keeping the core specs of the Lead II and Lead III much as they were 38 years ago. Lesser-known models such as these are fair game when it comes to having fun with finishes – and 'fun' is the operative word here. We haven't seen a green or purple quite as vivid as these since we stopped writing with crayons.

Fortunately for those in danger of reissuing their breakfast as a result of these lurid hues, there are more sober (and vintage-correct) options for both guitars: Black or Crimson Red Transparent for the single-coil model, and Olympic White or Sienna Sunburst for the humbucker-packing Player Lead III.

Let's get some context. Between 1979 and the launch of Fender Japan in 1982, the Leads filled a simple niche at the low end of the company's all-American six-string range: they were no-frills axes for the post-punk era, combining Stratocaster stylings with the simplicity of the Telecaster. Their legacy is hardly in the same league as either of those giants, of course, but that makes them perfect candidates for the modern Mexican-built Player Series.

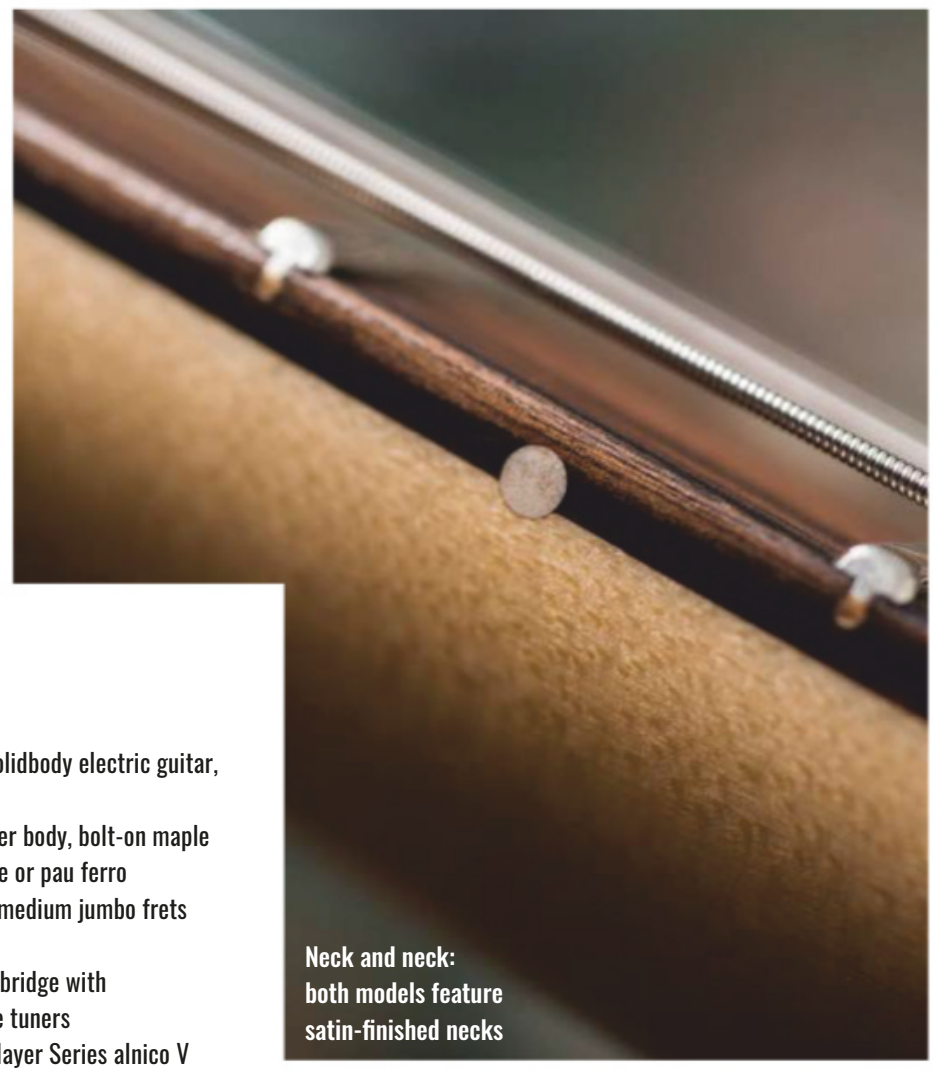
Coming in at just under the £600 mark, we get the Lead II, which looks uncannily like the 1979 original, right down to the blocky headstock logo and the cramped pickup switches, and the Lead III, which sports the same coil-split-equipped twin-humbucker configuration as its 1982 ancestor.

They may look rather like student guitars, but both models have Fender's full 25.5-inch scale length and, thanks to the aforementioned switches, some handy tonal options. The extra toggle on the Lead II is a phase-flipper for quacky cancellation in the middle position, while the one on the Lead III can be used to put either pickup (but not both) into single-coil mode.

The basic body shape isn't likely to alienate longtime Fender fans, with a Strat-style double cutaway and a generous belly-carve swooshed out of the back. Alder and maple construction keeps things classic (you get a maple or pau ferro board depending on the finish), and the bridge is functional Fender at its best: a simple hardtail with six solid saddles, three screws holding it in place and the strings running through the body.

New slant: the pickups are the same alnico V units found in the Player Stratocaster

New kid on the block: the blocky headstock logo is a replica of the 1979 original



Neck and neck: both models feature satin-finished necks

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER LEAD II
PRICE £599
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Double-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 9.5" radius maple or pau ferro fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Through-body bridge with block saddles, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Fender Player Series alnico V Strat single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, three-way pickup switch and phase-reverse switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42mm at nut, 51.2mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.1kg/6.8lb
FINISH Neon Green (as reviewed), Crimson Red Transparent, Black
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com

We're in familiar territory in terms of the pickups, too, at least with the Lead II, whose pickups are both fitted at a dynamic slant and are the same alnico V units you'll find in the Player Stratocaster. The Lead III's alnico II humbuckers, meanwhile, are shared with the Player Stratocaster HSS and Jazzmaster. It's safe to say we're not expecting these guitars to sound quite as far-out as they look.

IN USE

Jelly babies, party balloons, Lego's Friends Baking Competition playset – if it's brightly coloured and affordable, it's probably aimed at young people. With that in mind, it's no surprise that the new Fender Leads are easy, straight-down-the-middle players. The satin-finished 'medium C' necks and the medium-jumbo frets are gently welcoming to all, especially with their 0.009-0.042 strings, and both our test guitars are set up with novice-friendly low actions.

Acoustically, both instruments are on the lightweight side, with the Lead II offering a touch more zing and the Lead III able to counter with a more solid midrange. Let's see how the pickups translate that into neighbour-bothering rock.

The Strat-like qualities suggested by the Lead II's specifications are very much present and correct. Clean tones are brisk and characterful, with lots of slappy attitude when you dig in on individual notes. There's certainly no shortage of treble on either pickup, and we soon find ourselves dialling the tone control down to about six or seven for a more balanced response.

There's a fair bit of phasey complexity on the bridge pickup but even more in the middle position – a setting that, remember, Fender's three-pickup icon doesn't normally support. This is where the Lead II really excels as a Strat-Tele hybrid, combining the breezy freshness of the former with the chiming sweetness of the latter.

Purple patch: the Lead III in deep Purple Metallic

Take control: the slightly cramped control array is period-correct

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER LEAD III
PRICE £599
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Double-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 9.5” radius maple or pau ferro fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Through-body bridge with block saddles, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Fender Player Series alnico II humbucking pickups, master volume and tone, three-way pickup switch and three-way coil-split switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5”/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.8mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.3mm at first fret, 22.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.1kg/6.8lb
FINISH Purple Metallic (as reviewed), Sienna Sunburst, Olympic White
LEFT-HANDERS No

Tune up: both models have old-school F-stamped tuners

Then we flip the phase switch and are greeted by a quack so extreme it feels like being attacked by angry mallards. It's not clear whether the average player will have any use for a sound as hollowed-out as this, but it could be a cool thing to have in the locker nevertheless.

As we make the transition from gaudy green to violent violet, it's worth noting that the toggle switches on both of these guitars are a bit of a pain. They're very close together and feel stubby and uncertain, and, as we mentioned earlier, the coil-splitter on the Lead III doesn't include an option for running both pickups in their slimmed-down states together.

Still, there's not a lot wrong with this guitar in full humbucking mode. Predictably, it's a lot darker than the Lead II, and all three positions provide chunky yet articulate tones that work well with a serving of Marshall-style overdrive for old-school Superstrat lead work.

The clean stuff is nice too, and there's a surprise in store when we activate the coil-split on either pickup: the lower mids thin out as expected but not in a way that leaves the guitar sounding in any way underpowered. The top end actually seems to expand to fill the gap and suddenly the Lead III becomes even more bright and spiky than the Lead II. This could prove useful but, as before, you're likely to be reaching for the tone control to keep things balanced, so just make sure you're ready to whip it up to 10 again when you bring back the second coil.

All in all, then, that's a pretty decent selection of tones from a solidly built pair of instruments, with a few quirks but no deal-breaking flaws. The only real thing missing from this reborn range, in fact, is the Lead I model, with its single, splittable, series/parallel-switchable humbucker. Now that would look lovely in pink, don't you think? G

8/10 **A lively spanker that makes us wonder whether Strat pickups should travel in pairs more often**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Danelectro DC59 **£589**, Eastwood Airline Bighorn **£514**, Fender Player Mustang **£549**

8/10 **A meaty-voiced rocker whose twin-humbucker tonal arsenal is boosted by useful switching tricks**

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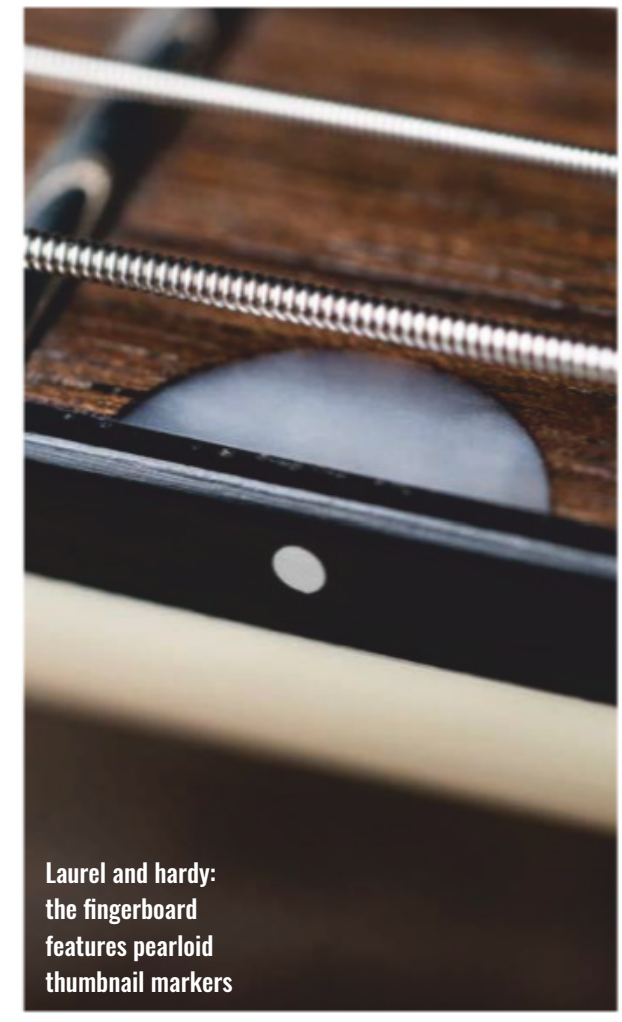
PRS SE Mira **£599**, Yamaha Revstar RS320 **£434**, Fender Player Duo-Sonic HS **£549**



Laurel and hardy: the fingerboard features pearloid thumbnail markers

GRETSCH
G2210 STREAMLINER JUNIOR JET CLUB

WORDS HUW PRICE

This stripped-down and hot-rodded Gretsch solidbody has a tempting price tag to match

The Duo Jet came hot on the heels of the Gibson Les Paul, with the initial script-logo examples appearing in 1953. In that less litigious era, Gretsch could settle a dispute with Fender with a simple telegram, and Gibson was apparently content to let Gretsch continue making what was, from the outside at least, tantamount to the very first Les Paul copy.

Besides the headstock, pickguard design and Gretsch's arguably more elegant body outline, this G2210 has little in common with the various vintage Gretsch Jet models. In fact, with its flat-fronted solid body and wrap-around 'lightning' tailpiece, the G2210 has more in common with a Les Paul Special than a Standard.

After our recent encounter with Epiphone's new Les Paul Special, it's interesting to see another guitar with the same tailpiece. Here, we must make the same observation about this guitar's bridge ending up at a disconcerting angle when the intonation is correctly adjusted. But it does the job and the tone doesn't suffer.

The controls are similarly stripped down, in a Junior/Special sort of way, with a master volume, master tone and a three-way toggle pickup selector. But the volume control is mounted on the cutaway horn in true Gretsch fashion, and the G2210 also packs a pair of full-size Broad'Tron humbuckers.

Mahogany may be the material you'd expect for a guitar of this sort but here the body and bolt-on neck are made from nato. Although unrelated, nato is sometimes referred to as 'eastern' mahogany, and it's a well-proven tonewood used widely by guitar manufacturers in Southeast Asia.

The laurel fingerboard features pearloid Neo-Classic thumbnail markers and black plastic binding and, though laurel only became commonplace because the use of Indian rosewood was restricted by CITES, we have absolutely no objections to it, visually or sonically.

Clear and unmarked gold 'speed' knobs combine with a tortoiseshell pickguard and a set of die-cast tuners with 'kidney' buttons. For such an affordable instrument, the build quality is impressive, with a flawless Vintage White gloss finish and superb fret dressing.

IN USE

Following so soon after the Gretsch G2622TG Streamliner, we're similarly bowled over by the G2210's natural resonance and sustain. The G2210's tone isn't as full or warm as the set-neck Les Paul Special but, instead, you get a brighter chime, with more snap and twang. Whether that can be attributed to the choice of materials or the neck-attachment method is tough to say, but we like it anyway.

Despite their dimensions, the Broad'Trons definitely share certain sonic characteristics with conventional Filter'Trons. There's the same hazy clarity, a bark in the mids and not a massive amount of bass depth. The Broad'Trons are more powerful, however, with a slightly brasher upper midrange.

The Junior Jet Club is not meant to be a vintage repro and there's much to like about it on its own terms. The neck is very comfortable, it's a fine weight and it has a punky, power-pop-friendly character that's enormous fun. It won't sustain like a Les Paul Special, but we appreciate the extra jangle and twang. G

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £305
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Solid nato body, bolt-on nato neck, bound laurel fretboard with 12" radius, 22 medium-jumbo frets, synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Compensated wrap-around bridge, diecast tuners with 'kidney' buttons
ELECTRONICS 2x Broad'Tron humbucking pickups, master volume and tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.6mm at first fret, 23.7mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.1mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.28lb/3.33kg
FINISH Vintage White (as reviewed), Gold Dust, Gunmetal, Imperial Stain
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT gretschguitars.com

8/10 **A well-made and fine-playing guitar with upgrade potential, but it faces stiff competition**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Les Paul Special **£349**, Yamaha Revstar RS320 **£299**, Vintage V132 Reissued **£349**

Red devil: the Diablo Supreme in Burgundy Blackburst Transparent High Polish

Stay tuned: both models boast tune-o-matic bridges and stop tailpieces

FRAMUS
D-SERIES DIABLO SUPREME & IDOLMAKER

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Made in China using German engineering and American electronics, are these models a match made in heaven or diabolus in musica?

Framus launched the D-Series back in 2018, a new line based on the team-built German Pro Series and Custom Shop models but manufactured in the same Chinese facility as parent company Warwick's RockBass series. The venture had auspicious, ambitious beginnings, with Framus offering a seven-strong range of D-Series models, which included signature instruments from Accept's Wolf Hoffmann, as well as Bon Jovi guitarist and YouTube star Phil X. Even left-handers came at no extra charge.

Despite the D-Series' variety of designs, staple features across the range included tiger-stripe ebony fretboards, as well as Seymour Duncan pickups (except for the Hoffmann signature), Warwick Security straplocks, and soft gigbags. The series was revamped towards the end of 2019 and now boasts an even greater number of models, including the Idolmaker.

The Diablo Supreme is the more conservative looking of our review guitars. With its S-style outline, mahogany body, carved top with figured maple veneer and set mahogany neck, it falls somewhere between Fender and PRS in terms of construction and aesthetic.

The dark and sumptuous ebony 'board and 12-inch radius provide a slick playing surface, and the gloss finished, comfortably fulsome C-shape neck carve provides comfort and support for every style of rhythm and lead playing.

Pick of the bunch: both models feature Seymour Duncans

Planet rock: the Idolmaker looks like it comes from another planet

The Diablo's neck-join area is neat and tidy but a little portly, which, though not necessarily restrictive, takes up a good portion of your palm capacity when you venture up to the highest reaches of the fretboard. However, the extra girth has no significant effect on the overall weight and, strapped on, the guitar is comfortable and well balanced.

Despite both review models sharing construction specifications and woods, their appearance couldn't make for a starker contrast, with the sinister industrial styling of the Idolmaker lending it the appearance of an instrument from another planet, let alone model series. The reverse-body offset design has a hint of Firebird about it – but that's something of a hot topic right now so we'll let you decide what it resembles.

The satin finish brings an understated elegance to the highly figured maple veneer, offering a gentle appeasement to those who might be put off by the potentially divisive body shape. The Idolmaker has a shorter, Gibson-style 24.75" scale length, as well as a satin-finished neck, although the neck carve feels similar to the Diablo Supreme. Ultimately, it will be your scale-length preference that will determine which is the more appealing guitar in terms of playability.

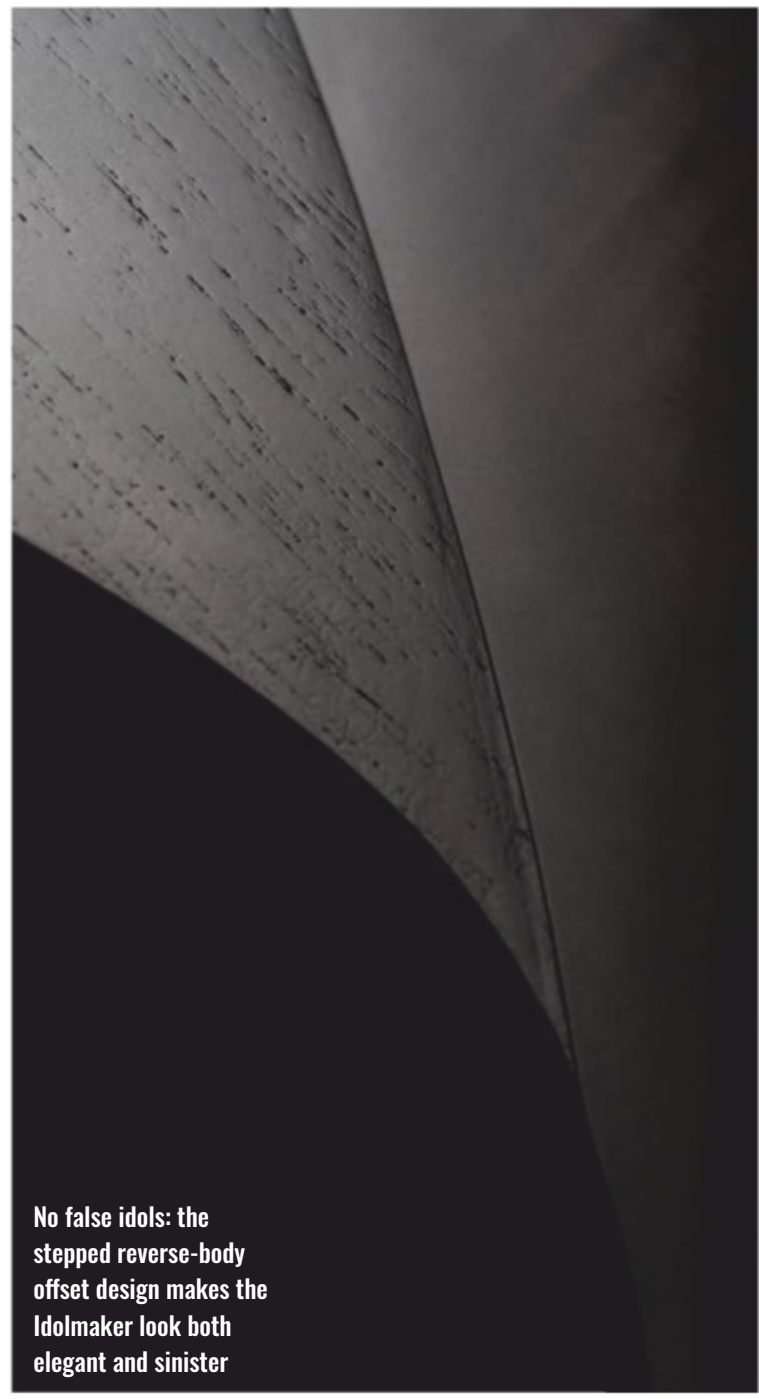
IN USE

The introduction of a more affordable series usually means a downgrade in onboard electronics, so it's commendable that the D-Series has retained the Seymour Duncan pickups usually found on Framus's German-built models. While there are a massive amount of lauded boutique pickup makers out there these days, for many – including this reviewer – the Duncan SH-4B JB and SH-1N '59 continue to be the benchmark pairing for rock guitars, and thus a perfect choice for the total power-rock stylings of the Diablo Supreme.

Played through a Plexi-style amp with a drive at the front end, the bridge position has all the power and rich midrange we've come to expect from the JB, but withthe ebony 'board providing crisper highs and a tighter bottom. The bulky neck joint delivers all the tonal benefits you might expect from beefing up such a structurally significant area, and there is sustain aplenty on the bridge pickup – and that's despite the best efforts of our noise gate to snap shut.

Head hunter: both guitars share the same headstock design, with model designations on the truss-rod covers

Back in black: both models boast ebony fretboards



No false idols: the stepped reverse-body offset design makes the Idolmaker look both elegant and sinister

The neck position has a more vintage character and, though it's perhaps not as smooth as we were expecting, there's a welcome sprinkle of brightness once again provided by the ebony 'board. The lower horn slightly encumbers some of our wide stretches on the wound strings when playing high up the neck but, unless you're doing technically demanding gymnastics in this area, it shouldn't prove an issue.

A few tweaks to the truss rod and action, and the Idolmaker proves highly playable and acoustically resonant. Strapped on, however, it immediately ventures south and a lot of strap adjustment is necessary to help prevent neck dive. Fortunately, this phenomenon only occurs when standing – ironically, despite being an instrument that seems to have been designed with rocking out in mind, it provides a pleasant and comfortable playing experience when seated.

In the bridge position, the Idolmaker shares many similarities with the Diablo, and packs all the punch, power and clarity we need to burn through heavy riffs. Even though both guitars share identical pickups, the Idolmaker is an entirely different prospect in the middle and neck positions. There's an almost single-coil-like snap to the middle position, making for a marvellously versatile sonic palette. The neck pickup also has an aggressive snap, offering an array of punchy rhythm and lead sounds.

Although the D-Series faces stiff competition in this congested area of the market, high-quality appointments such as the Seymour Duncan pickups help to set these models apart. The Diablo Supreme is a wonderful rock guitar, perfect for sleazy hard rock and prog-metal, and while the Idolmaker's appearance will be more appealing to the metal crowd, it's a much more versatile machine than it looks. Just watch out for that neck dive when it's strapped on. G

KEY FEATURES

D-SERIES DIABLO SUPREME
PRICE £809 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric, made in China
BUILD Double-cutaway mahogany body with AAAA-grade flame maple veneer, C-shape set mahogany neck with 12" radius tiger-stripe ebony fretboard, dot inlays, 22 jumbo nickel frets and graphite nut
HARDWARE Framus machineheads, tune-o-matic bridge, stop tailpiece, Warwick Security straplocks
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan SH-1n '59 (neck) and SH-4B JB (bridge) humbuckers, volume, tone, three-way toggle pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK DEPTH 22.4mm at 1st fret, 25.1mm at 12th fret
NECK WIDTH 43.6mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 51.5mm at bridge, 35.8mm at nut
WEIGHT 4kg/8.8lb
FINISH Burgundy Blackburst Transparent High Polish (as reviewed), Nirvana Black Transparent High Polish, Bleached Ocean Blue Burst Transparent High Polish
LEFT-HANDERS Nirvana Black Transparent High Polish only
CONTACT htd-uk.com, warwick.de

8/10 **Rocking sounds and sleek stylings but with a menacing tonal bite**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS SE Custom 24 **£799**, Schecter Hellraiser C-1 **£889**, Chapman Guitars ML1 Pro Modern **£999**

KEY FEATURES

D-SERIES IDOLMAKER
PRICE £872 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Six-string electric offset solidbody, made in China
BUILD Offset mahogany body with AAAA-grade flame maple veneer, C-shape set mahogany neck with 12" radius tiger-stripe ebony fretboard, dot inlays, 22 jumbo nickel frets and graphite nut
HARDWARE Framus machineheads, tune-o-matic bridge, stop tailpiece, Warwick Security straplocks
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan SH-1n '59 (neck) and SH-4B JB (bridge) humbuckers, volume, tone, three-way toggle pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK DEPTH 22.6mm at 1st fret, 24.2mm at 12th fret
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 53.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 51.7mm at bridge, 35.8mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.9kg/8.6lb
FINISH Nirvana Black Transparent Satin (as reviewed), Solid Black Satin, Nirvana Black Transparent High Polish, and Burgundy Blackburst Transparent High Polish
LEFT-HANDERS Nirvana Black Transparent Satin only

7/10 **Eye-catching design with a versatile range of rock and metal tones**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Firebird **£549**, Chapman Guitars Ghost Fret Pro **£1,049**, Fender Jim Root Jazzmaster V4 **£1,139**

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BLACKSTAR
SONNET 60

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Blackstar has teamed up with acclaimed acoustic singer-songwriter Jon Gomm to create a smart new solution for gigging musicians at an extremely competitive price-point

Successfully amplifying your beloved acoustic guitar can be a considerable challenge for players at any level. Acoustic instruments have sensitive souls and the kind of kit capable of doing them justice (namely high-end microphones, preamps and hybrid pickup systems) can often be beyond the fiscal range of most gigging players.

Cue Blackstar Amplification. The Northampton company has collaborated with British singer-songwriter Jon Gomm, one of the world's most gifted and tonally demanding acoustic guitar players, to create the Sonnet series. More information on the R&D process is revealed in our interview with Gomm on page 101 but, here, we're taking a close look at the 60-watt model, in a dapper combination of cream and copper. More traditional black cosmetics are also available, as is a 120-watt model (£479) with additional features, including effects loops and phantom power.

The Sonnet 60 is a twin-channel amp, which in the acoustic world means you can run two input sources through it, rather than there being different gain stages. Channel one has a jack input and an independent gain knob, and features a three-band EQ alongside a reverb knob with which to dial in either plate or hall-flavoured ambience. Channel two features a combination jack/XLR input and forgoes the three-band EQ in favour of low and high knobs. Both of the channels feature a 'shape' switch, which provides a mid-scoop when engaged.

Switch it up: the Sonnet boasts generous reverb, filter and brilliance controls

Port hole: both Sonnet models feature ported cabinets

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £349
DESCRIPTION 2-channel acoustic combo amplifier, made in China
POWER RATING 60W
CONTROL PANEL Channel 1: jack input, gain, low, mid, high, reverb, phase, shape. Channel 2: combined jack/XLR input, gain, low, high, reverb, shape. Global phase switch, master reverb time, master volume, hall/plate reverb selector, high-pass filter, brilliance, Bluetooth
REAR PANEL USB Audio, mix DI output with ground lift switch, MP3/line in, footswitch, power on/off
SPEAKERS 1x 6.5" speaker + tweeter
DIMENSIONS 345 x 310 x 250mm
WEIGHT 7.7kg/16.9lb
ADDITIONAL FEATURES Tilt-back stand, ported cabinet, optional PA stand mount
OPTIONS Black/black or cream/copper cosmetics
CONTACT blackstaramps.com

More experienced acoustic-amp users will notice the control layout's resemblance to the venerable AER Compact 60, which has been the industry standard for many years. There are, however, some subtle differences, such as the Sonnet's high-pass filter and brilliance controls, low-latency USB out, Bluetooth connectivity, and global phase switch to help prevent feedback.

Keep control: other amps don't sound like no Sonnet

Out and out: Sonnet 60 has a mix DI out, while the 120 has a DI out for each channel plus mix

Cream of the crop: the cream covering and copper grille is a winning combination

IN USE

We start with an undersaddle-pickup-equipped Takamine which, while not known for its subtlety, certainly proves the Sonnet 60's capabilities when dealing with the spiky transients typical of piezo systems, giving us a strummed sound that's almost quack-free.

Next, we introduce a nylon-string wildcard in the shape of a silent Yamaha SLG-100, which sounds better through the Sonnet 60 than our usual (and considerably pricier) gigging amp, and brings out all the beauty of nylon-strung bossa nova. The neck humbucker of a Gibson L-5 confirms our initial impressions of the Sonnet 60 as an exceptional amp for jazz: the sound is warm and detailed, with extended chord harmony and fast runs coming through clearly.

Finally, we plug in a supreme example of the luthier's art, a Kostal Modified Dreadnought in mahogany from The Tree and German spruce. Usually, we would use an external condenser mic when amplifying this guitar but, in its 60-watt form, the Sonnet doesn't offer phantom power (you'll need the Sonnet 120 for that). That said, it does a splendid job of reproducing this instrument's huge natural sound, taming the passive K+K Sound pickup's upper-midrange hump and bringing out much of the immediate response and full sonic spectrum typical of a good modified dreadnought.

The Sonnet 60 is a strong performer by any standard but its competitive pricing (less than half that of the AER Compact 60) makes it even more attractive. G

9/10 **An impressive entry into the acoustic market by one of the UK's top amp names – keenly priced with great sound**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

AER Compact 60 Mk4 £899, Roland AC-60 £439, Fishman SA330x Performance Audio System £599

BEHIND THE LINES

Few acoustic players push their gear harder than Jon Gomm. He talks us through the R&D process behind Blackstar's first foray into the world of acoustic amplification

"The problem with acoustic amps is that there are two kinds. There's the one that's basically an electric guitar amp, except it's brown. I know they're voiced differently, but they're usually closed-back electric combos with maybe a tweeter, and they just try and keep it as clean as possible. In terms of sound, you might as well use a keyboard amp. I'd be pretty reluctant to sing through one.

"Then there's the other kind, which is much more hi-fi and sounds much better. The problem with those, I've found, is that they either don't have the frequency range I need, with enough low end for a percussive kick drum sound, or they can't handle the dynamics – usually both.

"With one of those amps, I could sing a long note and then slap the strings, and because that's such a high-velocity sound, the amp's compression would kick in and the volume of my voice would dip like a ducking effect in the studio. So that kind of amp is the worst of both worlds for me. They sound boxy because I lose all my low end – they don't really register below 80hz, and my kick drum sound lives at 40hz, and I play tuned low anyway."

PROBLEM SOLVING

"Blackstar hadn't actually started designing this amp when they first contacted me, so it was obviously a great opportunity to get properly involved in the process. I had worked with amp companies in the past but no-one had ever done that before. Basically, we wanted to create an amp that would have the neutral hi-fi quality, only with the full frequency range to go down low. I'm really pleased with it. It sounds really good.

"One of the great things about working with Blackstar is just how far they'll go to get the sound. They're happy to push the boundaries. The Sonnet 60 was designed with [chief engineer] Paul Stevens and we worked together to make it happen. He took great pains to make sure that the amp that he designed and prototyped would be exactly the same as the production models. That's not always the case.

"We tested several multi-pickup systems through this amp, as well as basic piezo pickups, so it should sound great with your preferred pickup system, whatever that happens to be. I would like to say, though, that I was as keen to make sure this was a great amp for vocals as much as for guitar.

"At first, I would visit the workshop and we'd play around with it when it was just a load of circuit boards laid out with knobs on, plugged into a speaker. Then, one day, I turned up to find the team blowing smoke through the prototype to check the cabinet's integrity. Then, finally, it was ready to play through – so I plugged in and simply could not believe the sound that was coming out of this little box. It actually reminded me of playing through a PA with an 18-inch sub.

"I remember asking, 'Why is it that I can walk into a bar and they've got a tiny Bluetooth speaker on their wall that can pump out a full frequency range with fucking insane low end?' I've been struggling to get that out of amps all my life! You know, speaker-cabinet technology has come on so much in the past few years but we're really not seeing those advances in the guitar-amp world in the same way That's the approach they used at Blackstar, I believe it's the future.

"For gigs, I'll be using a pair of Sonnet 60s for monitoring and to send a mix to front-of-house. Obviously, every venue has its own monitor systems, which means it can be a challenge for me to get a consistent sound. Now, of course, that won't be an issue. I have to admit, I'm also looking forward to playing with it on its own." G

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SPD2
RAMP
BLEND
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instruments
BYPASS
(HOLD FOR SPEED 2)
rotary cabinet 16 simulator
SPEED
9V DC
SPD2
RAMP
OUT
micro
BYPASS
(HOLD FOR SPEED
rotary cabinet 122 sim

Small packages: both units pack a great deal of functionality into compact enclosures

NEO INSTRUMENTS
MICRO VENT 122 & 16

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

No need to vent your frustrations here – Neo Instruments has created a pedalboard-friendly version of its superlative Ventilator rotary speaker simulator, available in two Leslie-inspired flavours

If Donald Leslie had ever come up with a micro version of the rotary speaker he invented in about 1940, it'd still have been as big as a toaster – and probably would have sounded like one, too. Luckily for Neo Instruments, minimising things is a lot easier when you do it digitally.

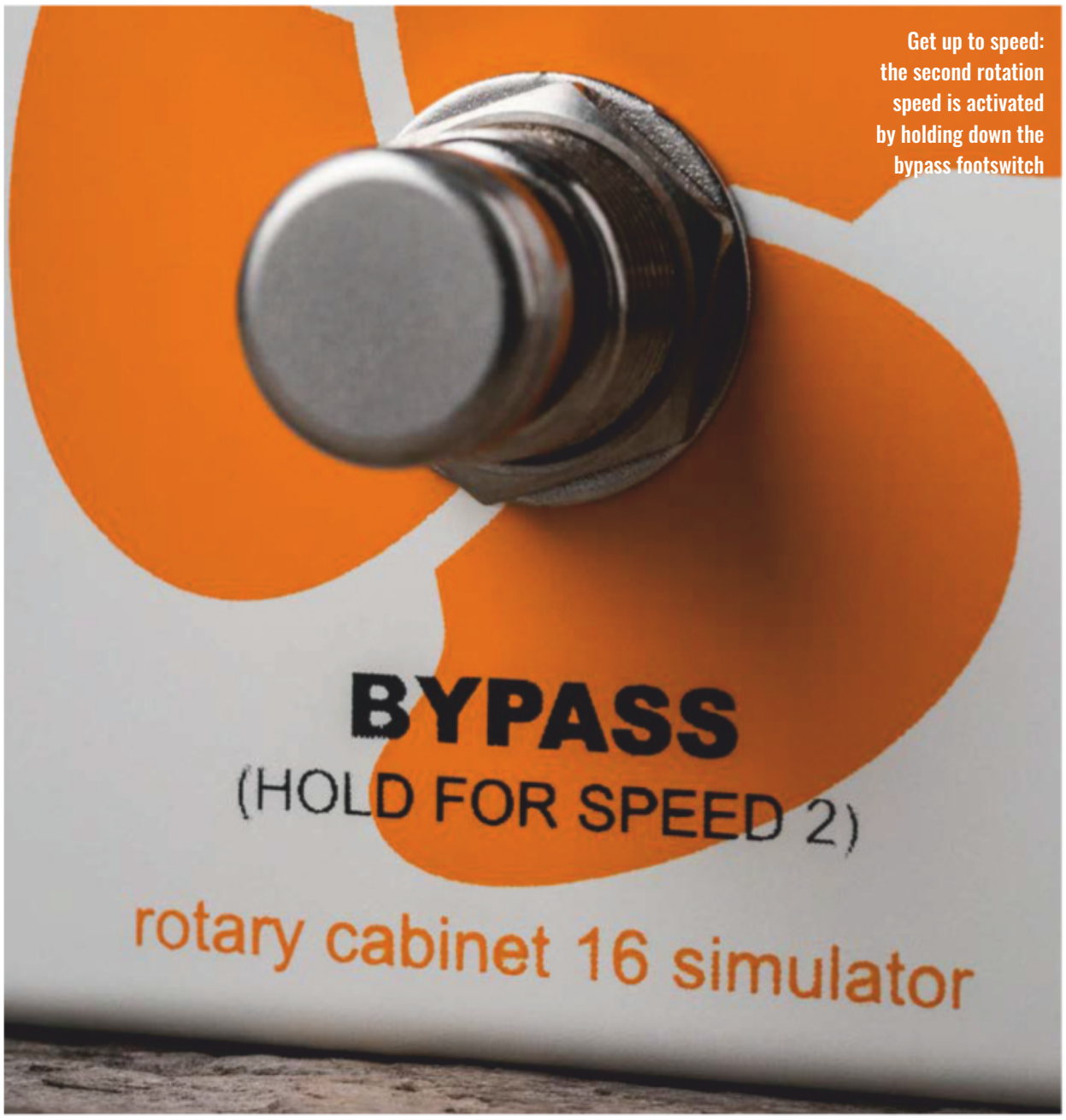
Neo launched its Ventilator pedal in 2011, into what was then a distinctly uncrowded field of Leslie simulators. These days, there are many to choose from, but the Ventilator II and slightly smaller Mini Vent II are widely regarded as the best of the bunch. The arrival of the compact Micro Vent, then, is big news for fans of the woozy wobble.

Leslie's crackpot invention was intended for use with Hammond organs but later put to more interesting use by a string of guitar bands from The Beatles onwards. It uses two separate rotating parts: a horn at the top for the high frequencies and a drum for the low-end stuff coming from the main driver. Thanks to the Doppler effect and the fact that the two motors are not always spinning at the same speed, this creates a uniquely rich and fruity mix of vibrato and tremolo plus, as we'll see later, elements of pretty much every other kind of modulation.

It's a wondrous sound but those old cabinets are big – there's a whole amp in there, not just the speaker system – so the appeal of capturing the Leslie swirl in stompbox form is clear. The game's been afoot since the 1960s, when the Shin-ei Uni-Vibe tried to do so with analogue circuitry, but ended up creating another classic effect type by mistake.

Neo's flagship Ventilator II is modelled on the Leslie 122, with independent drum and horn circuits plus onboard overdrive, adjustable fast/slow ramping and stereo outputs. The Mini Vent II manages to retain most of the same functionality within its narrower two-footswitch box but going fully compact brings a couple of inevitable compromises: the Micro Vents are mono, with no drive option, and you can only adjust one of the rotation speeds – the second, activated by holding down the bypass footswitch, is fixed at fast, slow or stop.

So how come there are two of these things? Probably because of a big-hatted Texan with the letters SRV on his pickguard.



Get up to speed: the second rotation speed is activated by holding down the bypass footswitch

While the black 122 model is built around the same algorithm as Neo's bigger units, the white pedal is based on a different original source: the Leslie 16. Also known as the Fender Vibratone (CBS bought both companies in 1965), this is a later, simpler rotary speaker with no horn. It's the model Stevie Ray used and that, in some circles, makes it about as holy as the Pope's favourite aftershave.

There are no other differences between these two German-made devices. Both have controls for rotation speed, microphone distance, ramping rate and effect/bypass blend, plus a toggle switch for selecting that preset secondary speed. As on the larger models, there are also some global settings you can tweak, including true or buffered bypass and a variety of alternative footswitch modes. Accessing these functions might seem fiddly but you merely have to plug in the power with the footswitch held down and wait for the blinking LED (and well-translated manual) to guide you.

IN USE

Comparing these pedals to an original Leslie cabinet would be nice but then, so would comparing every Telecaster we review to a 1950 Broadcaster. In truth, the most useful reference point here is probably the Neo Instruments Ventilator II – and, luckily enough, we have one of those to hand.

It doesn't take long to get a rough sonic match-up between the Micro Vent 122 and its three-switch daddy. At faster settings, we're plunged into a warm bath of sweet, throbbing modulation, deep but delicate, complex but clear. It's a familiar sound – with Cream's brilliant *Badge* riff being perhaps the most obvious example – and one you can't touch with chorus, vibrato or even this season's must-stomp effect, harmonic tremolo.

Then we hold down the footswitch to slow the motors down and they respond – almost immediately or over a few seconds, depending on where the ramp knob is set – by morphing into something more like a phaser, with a hint of flanger-like metallic whine. Fast and slow are two quite different but equally usable effects, and the transitional sounds when shifting between them are arguably even better.

It's much the same story with the Micro Vent 16 – imagine the same basic tone, but more transparent and less aggressive in the midrange, and somewhat mellower. This is especially true if you dial back the blend control – a useful feature common to both of these pedals but absent from he Ventilator II.

Dizzyingly good stuff, then? Mostly. There are a few issues. Firstly, the maximum rotation speed of both pedals is slightly lower than that of the bigger units, which means

they can't do the really quivery stuff that sounds so beautiful with clean picking high up the neck. Secondly, there are a couple of changes you can make to the global settings that are so useful – buffered bypass for pop-free switching and speed-selection that latches after one second so you don't have to keep your foot pressed down on it – that we wish they'd been made the factory defaults. That only takes a minute to fix, though.

Finally, and not so easily fixed, there's the price. For this kind of money you might well expect both sounds in a single unit, ideally with a mix control, rather than having to choose between them. Maybe, now that Neo has proved how good it is at shrinking its great-sounding pedals, we'll get that with the Nano Vent? **G**

KEY FEATURES

MICRO VENT 122
PRICE £269
DESCRIPTION Rotary-cabinet simulator pedal, made in Germany
CONTROLS Speed, distance, ramp, blend; three-way switch for second speed, latching/non-latching bypass footswitch for changing speed
FEATURES User-selectable global settings, including true/buffered bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 113 x 67 x 48mm

8/10 **Top-tier Leslie tones in a versatile yet board-friendly unit**

KEY FEATURES

MICRO VENT 16
PRICE £269
DESCRIPTION Rotary-cabinet simulator pedal, made in Germany
CONTROLS Speed, distance, ramp, blend; three-way switch for second speed, latching/non-latching bypass footswitch for changing speed
FEATURES User-selectable global settings including true/buffered bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 113 x 67 x 48mm
CONTACT neo-instruments.com

8/10 **An interesting and softer-voiced alternative to the 122**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Strymon Lex **£279**, Fender Pinwheel **£199**, Electro-Harmonix Lester K **£162**

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WALRUS AUDIO
JULIA V2

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

After making waves with its chorus/vibrato pedal in 2016, Walrus is testing the waters with a new update

For clean tones that boast boat-rocking motion and sea-shimmering textures, you'll probably want a chorus/vibrato pedal. While the market for boutique wobble-boxes is almost as saturated as it is for Big Muff clones, there are companies whose inventive take on this kind of pedal pushes musicality and sound quality beyond the norm and into uncharted territory – and that's especially true of Walrus Audio.

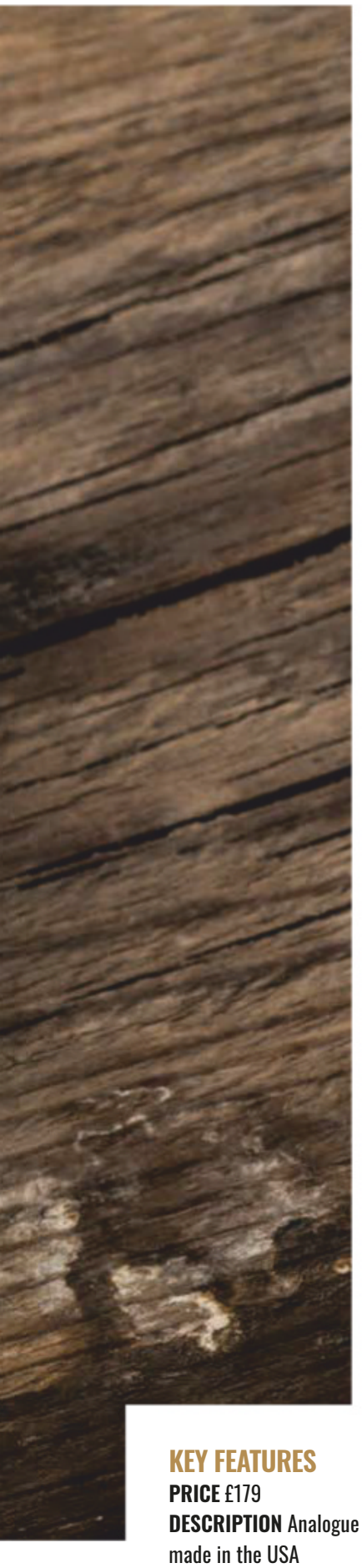
The Oklahoma-based maker has a hard-won reputation for delivering the goods, with an inspiring range of US-made pedals that spans a great deal of sonic ground. The brand's first chorus/vibrato unit Julia – named after an ocean-dwelling demigoddess and mysterious underwater phenomenon – was released in 2016 and has since become a firm favourite. For 2020, Julia has been given a makeover, which includes updated graphics from artist Adam Forster, a more pedalboard-friendly format and, for the first time, the Walrus Audio logo subtly recessed into the underside of the pedal.

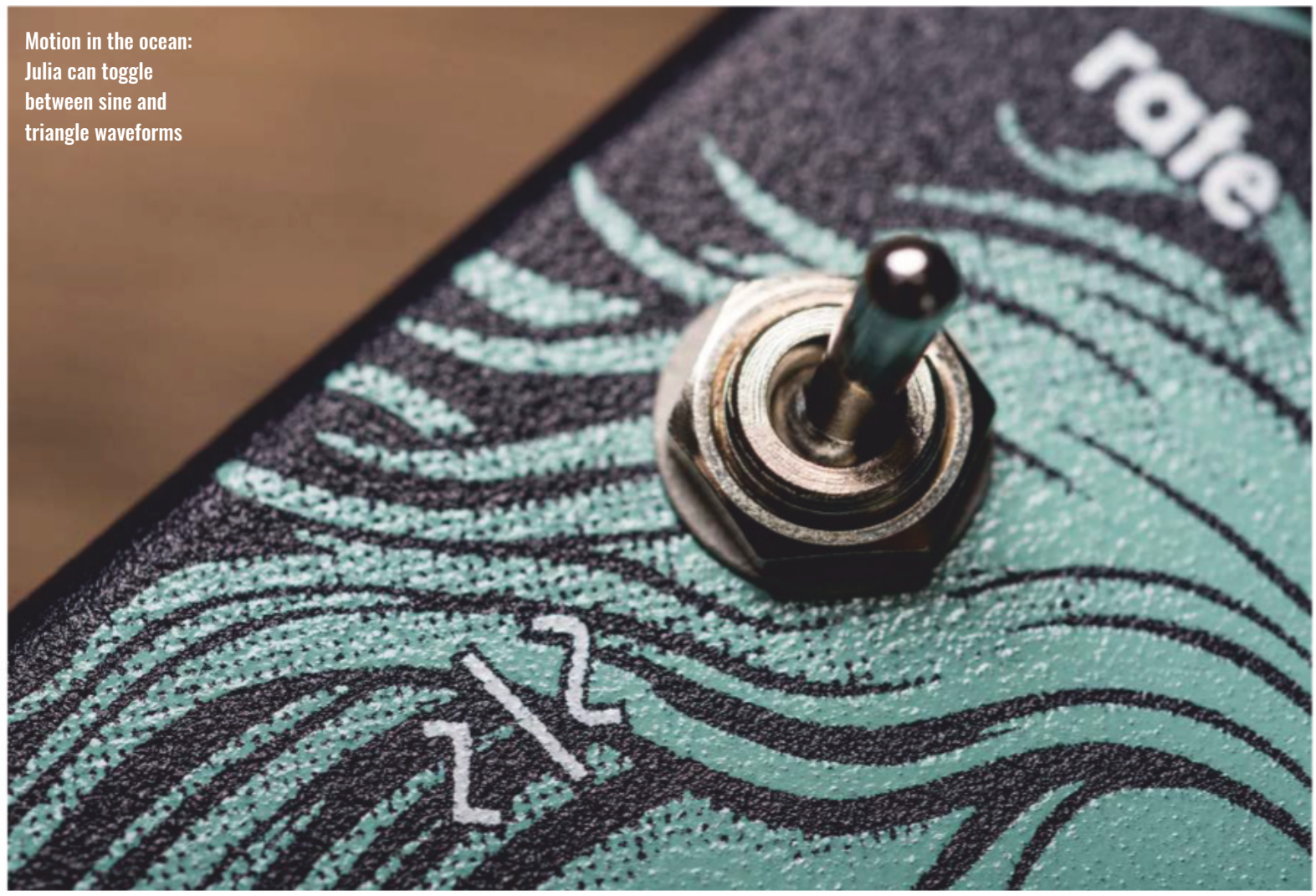
The analogue heart of the Julia V2 beats with hand-wired circuitry. The box offers everything you'd expect, plus more. There are the customary rate and depth controls, as well as a mini-toggle between sine and triangle LFO waveforms, and a DCV knob that travels smoothly from dry to chorus to vibrato. The secret weapon is its lag knob, which lets you control the centre delay time that dictates the LFO effect's modulation, allowing you to explore unusual textures.

As with all Walrus Audio pedals we've seen, the build quality is excellent and bodes well for the sounds to come.

IN USE

With its top-mounted jacks, the Julia V2 fits beautifully on our pedalboard and the soft-switch bypassing means engaging the pedal is pop-free.





Motion in the ocean: Julia can toggle between sine and triangle waveforms

Get your feet wet: the DCV knob sails smoothly between delay, chorus and vibrato

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £179
DESCRIPTION Analogue chorus/vibrato pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Rate, depth, lag, dry, chorus/vibrato blend knobs, sine/triangle LFO waveform mini-toggle switch
FEATURES Soft-switch bypassing, rate LED, on/off LED
DIMENSIONS 64 x 52 x 120mm
CONTACT face.be, walrusaudio.com

We begin with the sine-wave setting and gradually blend the effect into our signal. The chorus effect is smooth and subtle to begin with, and this musicality persists even in the more extreme settings. It's an organic-sounding chorus that bears, despite the pedal's theme, no hint of the wateriness that can be a problem in lesser units.

As expected, the triangle waveform is less subtle but still of high quality. It's ragged in a good way, reminiscent of a vintage Electro-Harmonix Small Clone, but as we move into vibrato, it becomes less usable, especially as we increase the depth.

The lag knob is particularly interesting on both waveforms, taking you from tight hi-fi textures to all-out psychonautic throbbing. This may be a little too much for some players, but it's there if you need it.

Another useful touch is the second LED, which flashes to give a constant indication of the current rate of chorus and/or vibrato, to help you make sure you're not shimmering when you should be wobbling.

Overall, there's more versatility on offer here than with the average chorus box and the Julia V2 handles that classic texture as well as anything else we have heard. There's a point where any chorus effect goes from delicious to obnoxious – but we struggle to find it here, especially as the blend knob effectively maintains the clarity of your attack while you explore more heavily modulated textures.

9/10 **A great new take on a classic effect. Even if you think you don't like chorus you may be pleasantly surprised**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

ThorpyFX The Deep Oggin **£249**, Mad Professor Double Moon **£199**, Fender Bubbler **£99**

STRYMON
IRIDIUM

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

This pedalboard-friendly amp and cab simulator might be the perfect solution for the modern guitarist

There's serious pay dirt out there for anyone who can design one of those rare problem-solving devices that dovetails with the requirements of modern musicians and becomes an essential component of their rigs. The Strymon Iridium ticks those boxes emphatically.

The sound and feel of classic tube amps is still the high-water mark for most guitar players. However, live gigs are getting quieter, there are legions of guitarists whose primary concert stages are YouTube and Instagram, and the pedalboard is the pre-eminent tone-shaper of the age.

While it might look like an everyday stompbox, it's helpful to think of the Iridium as an amp itself, sitting at the end of your signal chain the way one of the three vintage amplifiers it simulates might – albeit with a much less strenuous load-in.

Whether you are using the Iridium in stereo or mono into a PA system or audio interface, or as a headphone amp via the mini-jack socket at the front, the concept is the same. Each of its three onboard amp models comes with its own trio of impulse-response speaker-cabinet simulations, but if you have pre-existing favourites, you can hook the Iridium up to a computer via its USB port and load in third-party IRs via Strymon's Impulse Manager software. Tone-sculpting is carried out via drive, bass, middle and treble controls and, like the real thing, the tonestack in each amp model is nuanced and interdependent.

Chime is modelled after the Brilliant channel of a Vox AC30TB and sees the middle control operate as a tone cut, providing high-end roll-off. The Round

Get connected: the Iridium offers flexible connectivity, but no XLR out

voicing is based on the Normal channel of a Deluxe Reverb (another amp that traditionally doesn't have a middle control) and it delivers the original fixed-resistor value with the mids centred, with more scoop when you back it off and Tweed-style midrange entering the fray as you head clockwise. Punch is based on a 100-watt Plexi with additional gain on tap after two o'clock on the drive control.

In addition to the master level knob, there's a healthy splash of ambience available via the room control. Strymon describes this as a hybrid reverb, combining 256-millisecond stereo impulse-response captures of real rooms with the company's reverb-tank algorithm. The knob's secondary functionality (accessed by pressing and holding the main footswitch) lets you flip between a small, medium and large room. Like some other Strymon pedals, alongside the footswitch that toggles the unit on and off, there's also a favourite switch for instant recall of your go-to setting, regardless of how the knobs and switches are currently set.

The ability to bypass either the virtual cabinet or amplifier-modelling tech adds more strings to the Iridium's bow and, if you really want to venture into uncharted territory, it's possible to load any 24-bit 96kHz WAV impulse response into the unit – this could include acoustic instrument body resonance or even samples of other music. Experienced submariners can go even deeper with an external expression pedal for controlling parameters in real time, while MIDI unlocks control automation and 300 presets.

IN USE

Although there's extraordinary versatility on offer here, Strymon has managed to repeat its now-familiar party trick of extracting a great deal from a modest array of controls. With a high-performance 32-bit floating-point SHARC ADSP-21375 processor working together with an ARM co-processor to deliver 24-bit 96kHz 500ms impulse responses, there's enormous sophistication under the hood. Five years of R&D has paid dividends.

Kicking off in Chime mode, we're struck by how dynamic, responsive and amp-like the Iridium feels under the fingers. The tones are less stylised and produced-sounding than those offered by most modelling units, but that's a good thing. Through headphones or monitors, the experience will feel like home turf to anyone used to tracking guitars in the control room with an old Vox mic'd up in the live room next door – the combination of the tactile analogue JFET preamp and the vivid sense of space afforded by the room reverb helps enormously.

In full voice: the Iridium packs a Punch, as well as a Chime and a Round voicing

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £399
DESCRIPTION Amp modeller and impulse-response cabinet-simulator pedal, made in USA
CONTROLS Drive, bass, middle, treble, level, room, 2x 3-way mini toggles for amp and cabinet-sim selection, on/off and favourite footswitches, mono/stereo/summed input and output configuration selector switch
CONNECTIONS 1x jack input, 2x jack outputs, combined expression/MIDI, mini-USB for IR loading, mini-jack headphone output
POWER 9V DC centre-negative, 500mA minimum (power supply included)
DIMENSIONS 114 x 102 x 44mm
OPTIONS Works with Strymon MultiSwitch Plus (£139) for remote selection of up to four presets
CONTACT strymon.net

Although the cabinet simulations come with a description of the cab configurations and speaker types, it's best to leave real-world preconceptions at the door and let your ears decide which IR you prefer. For example, a Mesa/Boogie 4x12 with a mixture of Celestion and Electro-Voice speakers might on paper seem like a strange pairing with an AC30, but it certainly works here. Across the trio of cabs, judicious use of the drive control will open up a variety of Vox's greatest hits, from the claustrophobic rasp of Dave Davies to Heartbreakers' chime and raucous 1990s indie tones.

Thanks to the aforementioned middle control and the option of 1x12 or 2x10 cabinets, you can also summon multiple eras of Fender tone from the Round amplifier voicing.

Although it's the cleanest of the three amp models here, Round is a great platform for pedals and the pushed Blackface tones are as musically versatile as the real thing. Crank the mids and wind up the treble a few notches and you'll hear some of the chewy Tweed raunch that works so well for Americana of almost every stripe.

With the Punch voicing, each of the cabinet variations delivers power and excitement in spades. With all EQs at noon, the drive at about 4pm and a not inconsiderable amount of room reverb dialled in, our Telecaster's bridge pickup transitions from searing 1970s hard-rock in the back position to unadulterated Hendrix at the neck. The tones are harmonically complex and richly detailed, and the response to our guitar's onboard controls is superb – direct guitar tone doesn't get much more infectious or three-dimensional than this.

Although both the Marshall and Vox-inspired models have more drive on tap than their real-life equivalents, the Iridium is probably not a plug-and-play solution for instant metal gratification. However, if your favourite flavours of dirt are classic rock, pop and indie-inspired, then you're likely to enjoy the available textures immensely. If not, rest assured that the Iridium plays nicely with stompbox effects chains and gain-stacking. We enjoyed using it as part of a mini pedalboard with a RYRA Klone, an old TS9 Tube Screamer and a Strymon Flint reverb/tremolo in front of it, but try running delay and reverb effects after the Iridium for more of a studio outboard vibe.

Downsides? Like most Strymon units, it's power hungry and it's not cheap. There's also no XLR out. In addition, if the USB port allowed you to use the Iridium as an audio interface for computers and smartphones, then it really would be the silver bullet for direct guitar tone that today's players have been waiting for. Perhaps the future will bring an expanded version in a slightly larger form factor that throws USB audio and a few more amplifiers and effects into the equation. We can only hope. In the meantime, the Iridium will do nicely. *G*

9/10 **Simple to use and sonically sophisticated, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Line 6 HX Stomp **£449**, Kemper Profiler Stage **£1,449**, Mooer Preamp Live **£424**

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TEISCO

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A UNIVERSE OF FEARLESS MUSIC EXPLORERS

Dan Drive
Austin
pride

Face value: the Austin Pride is a refined take on the Fuzz Face theme

In bloom: this floral cloth cover is one of several cosmetic options

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €339 + €10/20 (depending on cosmetic options)
DESCRIPTION Fuzz pedal, made in Germany
CONTROLS Level, fuzz, clean-up, bias, 2x mini-toggle switches to select germanium or silicon transistors, or one of each
FEATURES Custom cloth covering, true-bypass switching, powered by a battery or a 9V power supply (DC 2.1mm centre negative adaptor)
DIMENSIONS 121 x 64 x 55mm
CONTACT atbguitars.com
Instagram @dandrivepedal

DANDRIVE AUSTIN PRIDE

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS ED OLESZKO

DanDrive pedals are beloved of pro players and have built up a significant following online. Does this latest unit impress or will pride come before a fall?

With his pedals meticulously handcrafted in the German city of Bremen and an Instagram-only approach to marketing, Daniel Querner has curated quite the following for his eponymous brand DanDrive. His range of effects are based on vintage fuzz circuits but sport some contemporary twists, such as mains-power compatibility and pedalboard-friendly top-mounted jacks.

They're built using carefully sourced new and NOS components, and come wrapped in a choice of eye-catching graphics and tactile coverings, which include cloth, lacquered tweed and relic'd metal. Dan's attention to detail even extends to the pedals' matching cloth-covered circuit boards on the inside.

The Austin Pride is a faithful recreation of the classic Fuzz Face circuit, with some interesting alterations. Alongside the usual level and fuzz knobs are controls for the bias of the transistors and an intriguing 'clean-up' control. The mini switches next to the footswitch are perhaps the most noteworthy feature, as they allow you to switch the circuit's transistors between military-spec OC75-equivalent CV2N1308 germanium units and gain-matched silicon NTE123AP ones.

Great care has been taken to ensure than the gain structures of the transistor types match up, allowing for balanced use of either germanium or silicon, or combinations thereof to sculpt your desired tone. Despite our concerns about the fragility and placement of these mini-switches near the stomping zone, we're assured that the design is thoroughly robust and has been road-tested.

IN USE

After plugging a '63 rosewood 'board Strat into a cleanish Blackface amp with the pedal's level maxed, the fuzz control rolled back a bit and bias set to taste, we're met with a fantastically authentic Fuzz Face experience. Thick and warm germanium fuzz, rich and enveloping sustain, and blurry-edged single notes and chords are coupled with the beautiful sparkly clean-up we associate with the best of these circuits.

If this was everything that the Austin Pride had to offer, we'd be mightily impressed – but there's even more fun to be had here. Switching both transistors to silicon gives the fuzz voice more midrange authority, note articulation and definition, and a tighter low end – it's perfect for cutting through a mix. Switching one transistor back to germanium reveals a best-of-both-worlds tone that boasts all the sonic benefits of both transistor varieties.

Some fuzz pedals are notoriously difficult to integrate with your rig. The Austin Pride, however, is spectacular in its versatility. Single-coils, P-90s, PAFs, clean amps, an overdriven Tweed combo – the DanDrive unit ingratiates itself like an intern at a free bar. The clean-up control in particular helps temper aggression and cut, with a dynamic midrange that could complement any guitar and amp – it's a huge bonus for gigging guitarists who may share a backline.

With its pedalboard-friendly size and power options, its clever circuit tweaks, its phenomenal tonal range and some of the coolest cosmetics we've seen in a while, DanDrive has produced a pedal to be proud of, whether you hail from Texas or not. G

9/10 **A stylish and modern take on the Fuzz Face, aimed at connoisseurs**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

JDM Union Fuzz **£107**, Analog Man Sun Face **£142**, Kingtone Vintage Fuzz **£26**

BECOS
COMPIQ TWAIN

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

If you feel like your stompbox compressor doesn't give you enough control, this could be the answer to your prayers – and then some

Hailing from Romania's Black Sea coast, Becos specialises in "exquisite musical tools for the professional musician". We got hands-on with the company's formidable Stella unit in 2019 but the Twain, a dual-band/stacked compressor for bass and guitar, offers several additional fathoms of immersion.

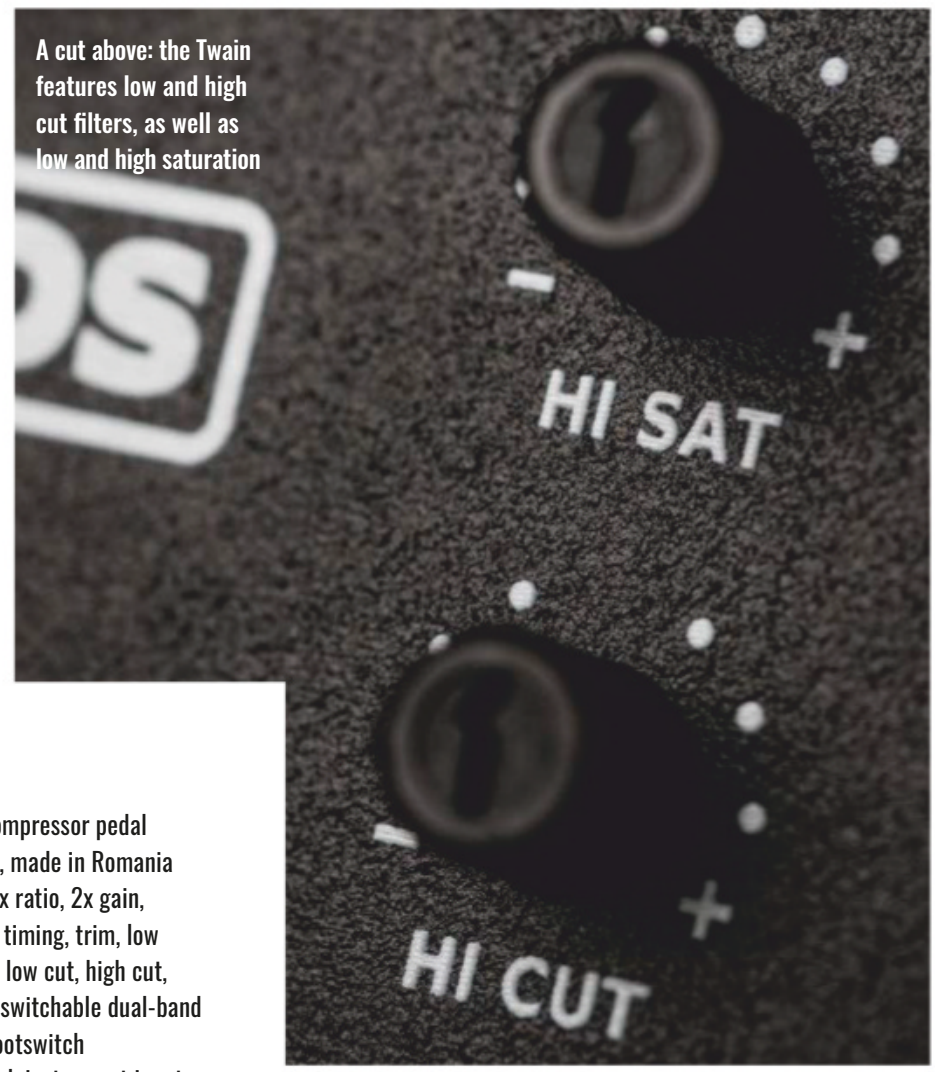
Though it bristles with controls, the Twain isn't quite as daunting as it appears. On each side of its centre line, most of the functionality is identical, with lows on the left and highs on the right. Both VCA compressors (processing engines) have make-up gain, ratio and threshold controls, which should be familiar enough, as well as LED displays to indicate the amount of gain reduction, switches for hard and soft-knee operation, and timing switches for fast and slow attack and decay times.

The sidechain filter switch only works on the lows, and has three settings to match guitar, bass and the extended depth of five-string basses. Trim ranges from -9 to +6dB and can be used to prevent high-output instruments from triggering compression too early, or to act as a compression driver or a one-knob balancer for the overall compression effect.

The signal passes through a variable-point crossover in dual-band (DB) mode, and the crossover frequency can be selected between 70Hz and 1kHz. Each frequency band is routed to its own compressor before they're mixed back together. Switching to stacked (STK) mode sends the signal through each compressor in series.

Low and high saturation controls act on the dry signal, post crossover, to simulate

Authorial intent: the Twain is one of the most versatile compressors you are likely to encounter



A cut above: the Twain features low and high cut filters, as well as low and high saturation

À la mode: the dual band and stacked modes offer even more functionality

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €299
DESCRIPTION Dual VCA compressor pedal with true-bypass switching, made in Romania
CONTROLS 2x threshold, 2x ratio, 2x gain, crossover, mix, 2x knee, 2x timing, trim, low saturation, high saturation, low cut, high cut, 3-position sidechain filter, switchable dual-band or stacked modes, on/off footswitch
CONNECTIONS 1/4-inch jack instrument input and output
POWER 9-18V DC centre-negative (not included)
DIMENSIONS 105 x 120 x 54mm
CONTACT becosfx.com

tape compression. It's meant to fatten the sound with harmonics when blended with the compression signal and, counter-intuitively, prevent bass fuzziness. High- and low-cut filters can be applied to the dry signal, post crossover, to help the saturation blend in and to compensate for frequency anomalies the compression could induce.

IN USE

Tests begin with the mix set to 100 per cent dry, high cut at zero and low cut at maximum to precisely match the Twain's dry signal with the true-bypass tone.

The high saturation control adds a pleasing overdrive but low saturation has little audible effect on guitar.

Swinging the mix to 100 per cent wet, the extraordinary versatility of this device becomes clear. DB mode behaves like a sophisticated and transparent rackmount compressor, while STK is far squishier and covers all the more brutal types of stompbox squish.

The crossover control balances high and low frequencies and helps the Twain exert strong control over transients, without noticeably affecting guitar tone or making it feel like you're fighting the compression.

The Twain is more like a multi-band mastering compressor than the units most guitarists will be familiar with. Although its features might seem excessive, it's ideally suited to the twin challenges of wider frequency and dynamic range presented by active basses. A lengthy familiarisation period will be required for any guitarists who decide to take the plunge but the Twain cooks up every style of guitar compression we can think of, from subtle and transparent detail enhancement to Lowell George to brickwall limiting with unlimited sustain.

9/10 **A remarkably versatile compressor pedal with a low noise floor and pristine audio quality**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley Compressor Pro **£299**, ThorpyFX Fat General **£219**, Origin Effects Cali76 Stacked Edition **£329**

EFFECTS COLLABORATIONS

WORDS CILLIAN BREATHNACH

Two heads are better than one, and in the field of guitar effects, the spirit of collaboration is inspiring some truly unique and interesting stompboxes

GAMECHANGER AUDIO X JACK WHITE
THIRD MAN RECORDS PLASMA COIL
£339

1 Given Jack White's love of guitar mangling, this collaboration with the mad scientists at Gamechanger Audio should come as no surprise. Just like the regular Plasma, the Plasma Coil generates its glitchy fuzztones via a xenon-filled tube, but for the Third Man Records iteration, the Latvian innovators have added a special effect footswitch for several flavours of octave chaos.

FENDER X BRUCE EGNATER
MTG TUBE DISTORTION
£139

2 Bruce Egnater is best known as the founder of Egnater Amplifiers, whose much-loved Tweaker lets you switch between various flavours of classic tube amp at your leisure. Who better, then, to collaborate with Fender on the MTG Tube Distortion, which contains a NOS 6205 preamp tube at its heart, and offers plentiful distortion sounds and a built-in boost.

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES X SUNN O)))
LIFE PEDAL
£320+ (used)

3 Experimental drone-metal deities Sunn O))) have a reputation for loud, scuzzy, devastating tones – and that's precisely what you get with this EQD pedal. Blending Rat-style distortion with an octave fuzz and several clipping modes, it's designed to replicate the all-encompassing tone of the band's recent Steve Albini-produced records *Life Metal* and *Pyroclasts*, both released in 2019.

WAMPLER X BRAD PAISLEY
PAISLEY DRIVE DELUXE
£249

5 The original Wampler Paisley Drive was a popular but short-lived pedal, but Brad convinced Brian Wampler to bring it back in a deluxe format that's double the size and double the fun. Offering the transparent overdrive of the original Paisley pedal but this time paired with the darker tones of Wampler's discontinued Underdog unit, this is another stellar stompbox collaboration from the Indiana maker and the country star.

LAND DEVICES X FARM PEDALS
NO MASTERS FUZZ
£160+ (Used)

6 Boutique brands Land Devices and Farm Pedals struck up a transatlantic partnership for this no-nonsense fuzz unit. Based on the Selmer Buzz Tone circuit, the No Masters' two knobs allow for control over volume and voltage, and its rocker switch lets you choose between overdrive and fuzz. Maintain a modern-day 9V fuzz tone or lower the voltage and travel back in time to the days of 3.5V fuzz pedals. Either way, this one's a winner.

JHS PEDALS X BOSS
ANGRY DRIVER
£149

7 The Angry Driver is an interesting team-up between boutique and mainstream pedal-makers, in the shape of JHS and Boss, respectively. Packed into a standard Boss enclosure is both the JHS Angry Charlie and the Boss BD-2 Blues Driver. The Angry Driver lets you use either sound on its own or blend the two to taste in either series or parallel, and uses Boss's concentric knobs to retain full control over each circuit.

THORPYFX X PETE HONORÉ
THE DANE
£249

4 Danish Pete's dual-mode pedal, created in collaboration with UK maker Adrian Thorpe, offers both boost and drive, and boasts Honoré's signature purple livery on the sides of the enclosure. The high-headroom boost on the right runs into the complex light-to-medium-gain overdrive on the left, creating an incredibly versatile array of drive tones that clean up beautifully, too.

CHASE BLISS X DROLO X OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVOURS MOOD
£349

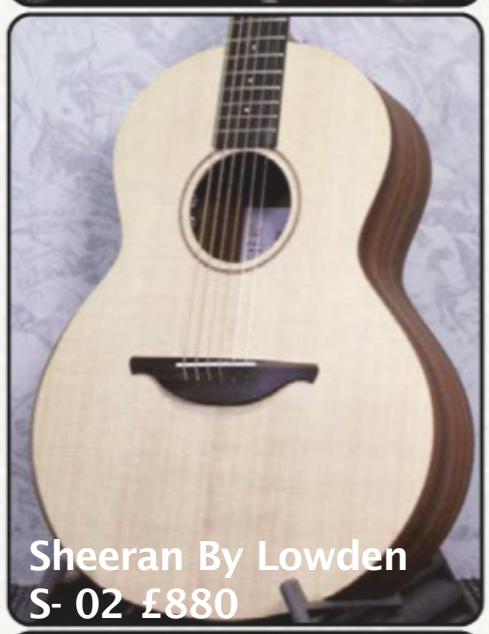
8 A rare instance of a three-way boutique collaboration, the Mood is a granular micro-looper/delay unit. Minnesota makers Chase Bliss hooked up with Belgium's Drolo, who created the 'always listening' micro loopers that allow for continual responsive ambience, and Oklahoma's Old Blood Noise Endeavours, who are behind the wet channel, a collection of time-based effects. It's a truly unique and inspiring unit.

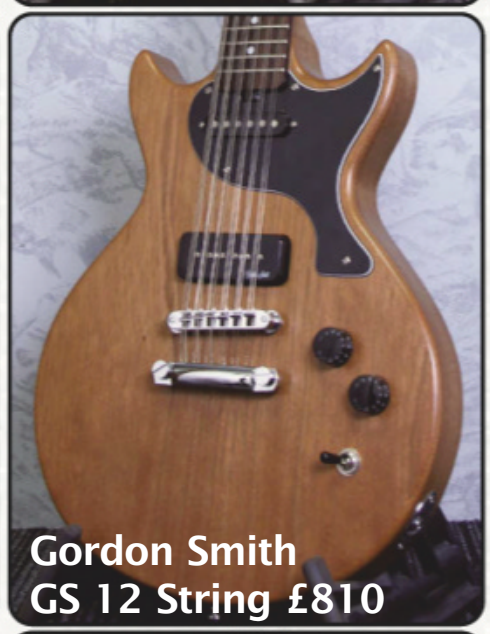
Forsyth
Est 1857

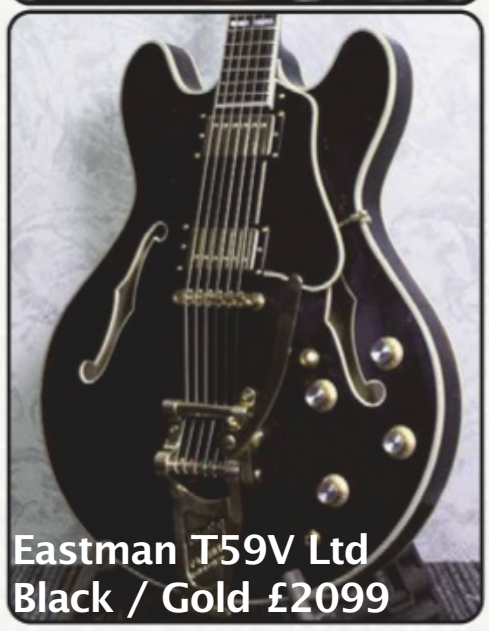
Highlights Of The Month

Martin 000- 12E Koa
£1399

Atkin "The '38"
£3499


Sheeran By Lowden
S- 02 £880


Gordon Smith
GS 12 String £810


Eastman T59V Ltd
Black / Gold £2099

Fender Japan Daybreak
Telecaster £949

ACOUSTICS
Main dealer for Lowden, Atkin, Brook, Sheeran, Patrick James Eggle, Martin, Faith, Auden, Seagull, Fender, Eastman, Aria, Crafter, Maton, Furch, Tanglewood

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Main dealer for Buguet, Ramirez, Raimundo, Ortega, Admira, Cordoba and Strunal

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Main dealer for Rickenbacker, Gordon Smith, Eastman, Fender, Gretsch, Danelectro, Maton, Squier, Revelation, Aria, Hofner, Godin, Cort

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INDUSTRY INSIDER

ANASOUNDS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

From bamboo-topped enclosures to pedals you can kick, French firm Anasounds has established itself as one of the most innovative and forward-thinking companies in the industry. We meet owner Alexandre Ernandez to discuss building portable spring tanks and electronics masterclasses

How did you get into guitar?

"It's a family story: my brother makes a living singing and playing piano; my father plays guitar, and transformed a valve radio into an amp; and my grandpa was a cabinet-maker, and built an SG clone for my father in his spare time. So I was born into a musical and handy family, and it was natural for me to try the guitar at some point."

When did you start building or tinkering with effects?

"As a nerd, I think I spent more time learning about gear than learning how to play my instrument well. At 13, I worked with my dad so I could save some money and buy a Boss GT-8. I spent a year with it, creating my own presets so I could play Daft Punk, Muse, Nirvana, AC/DC. I got all of those tones at home through my headphones. When I was 14, I decided to build my first fuzz – and it never worked. At that time, DIY kits were not as fancy and not as readily available as they are today. After that, I did more experiments with guitar wiring and pickups, etc. But it was only at 21, when I was at engineering school, that I had enough knowledge to understand the schematics, so I decided to try again. I started with a PCB clone of a Small Clone and, with all that I'd learned, found it really easy."

At what point did you realise that you had a viable business on your hands?

"It wasn't clear at first. In 2013, I was just prototyping pedals for myself when I was still at school. It was a good period to sell gear on eBay. I realised that people were willing to pay a couple of euros for my brutal clones. Then, between 2013 and 2015, I was 100 per cent into prototyping, with the aim of developing a product range and gaining an understanding of the market. Then, in 2016, I finished my studies and said to my colleague [co-founder] Magali Goullet that it was time we took this thing seriously. So, we both quit our day jobs and started Anasounds."

Did you have any external investment or support when you started out?

"You need to invest in yourself first of all, that's why we saved some money before we started. We are lucky in France – the government also helped and gave us a grant."

At what point did you feel like you'd really nailed your branding?

"People always recognise our brand because we try to make our pedals stand out. One of the ways we do this is by using laser-engraved bamboo on the top of the pedals. This is really different to what the competition presents and people like it. We also try to innovate every day and propose different approaches. We love to re-use vintage concepts in more simple or modern ways. This helps people bring back those gorgeous vintage tones but without all the constraints. We also launched a DIY section, because it's the way we started, and we want others to discover it, too."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"The Element was a really cool surprise. We arrived at NAMM 2019 with a very classic product in tow – a spring reverb.

We didn't realise how great a success it would be. For about 300 euros, buyers get some spring tanks as well as a true analogue/mechanical controller. It's a convenient system; it's modular and can be mounted on your pedalboard, your cab or anywhere else you can dream of. It was really surprising for us, to the point that even today we're still producing a *lot* of Elements and are still out of stock. We've counted more than 1,000 users of Element in less than a year."

ABOVE Anasounds' Spinner expression, Ages tremolo, and Sliver tremolo pedals

OPPOSITE the Element spring reverb is Anasounds' best-selling product

LEFT Anasounds founder Alexandre Ernandez taking a bite out of the market

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"Our masterclasses are my most exciting experiences. It was a dream of mine to run a class for electronics students. Finally, I've found a way to combine electronics and my passion for guitar, and am able to share that with even more passionate folks."

What are the biggest opportunities for the guitar industry in 2020?

"I think that guitarists have a lot of possibilities today – maybe too many. We still need to innovate and create new funky tones and features but there are too many copies and too many similar products. The media needs to find a way to interact more with the community, to teach us more about how to use it effectively and how to understand it. As a builder, we receive a lot of similar requests."

What's next for Anasounds?

"Our challenge throughout this year is to create and develop a new and innovative French media community by connecting YouTube channels and ecommerce, with a new approach to gear. We are doing this in association with other French YouTubers, and it will be totally independent, honest and full of passion. We are calling it Palf for Pédale à la Française. Regarding Anasounds, though, the team is growing larger, even in research and development, and this gives us the opportunity to work on more and more interesting projects, including new pedals and other related gear." G

Find out more at anasounds.com

SHOP TALK

JOHN PAGE

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

Aside from Leo himself, few names are more redolent of Fender's history than that of John Page, whose work continued to flourish once he left the Californian guitar empire

Throughout his life as a player and luthier, John Page has been striving for that intimate connection that helps musicians feel at one with their guitars. If you don't play, it's a notion that might seem peculiar, even kinky, but the importance of truly bonding with a guitar can't be overstated.

"That connection between the guitar and me as intimate writing partners became key," says Page. "It was the main thing I wanted in my guitar, this relationship and that vibration, you know? The connectivity between the guitar and myself, that vibration is critical. When I pick up a guitar and feel that before I even plug it in, that's key to me.

"Some guys use a lot of effects and stuff – and, the way I do my guitars, some of that might get lost on them. But the guy, the tone collector, the cat that sits there and really wants to hear it and feel it, that's who I build for. But I'm not trying to sell 350,000 guitars a year. It's a lot easier when you're just trying to build a dozen or so."

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

Page grew up living the Californian dream that defined the image Fender Electric Instruments cultivated in the 1950s and 1960s. Such did his interests and influences converge that we might conclude he was simply fated to end up a mover and shaker at the firm – and maybe he was. The fact that rock 'n' roll was frowned upon in the Page household only made the electric guitar more alluring, and that the family couldn't afford to indulge the young guitarist with off-the-shelf instruments spurred the go-getter to get his own woodworking chops in order.

Together, these factors whipped up the perfect storm that blew the aspiring aficionado on course to become a co-founding master luthier of the Fender Custom Shop, and allowed him to sail right on beyond that to one crowning achievement after another.

"I grew up in Whittier, California," says Page, "on the outskirts of Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s. So I was raised on surf music. We lived maybe 15 miles from the beach and used to go surfing and all of that, so I grew up with The Ventures, Dick Dale and the whole surf scene.

"My dad was a preacher. I had a very stripped-down, limited childhood, so working all my emotions out in music was mandatory for me! I got into music and songwriting real young. My dad had a cheap old classical guitar he bought in Tijuana, Mexico, and I got that from him and started plunking around to get all my secret emotions out."

From listening to Dr Demento's rock show on KPPC-FM while his parents were asleep in bed to playing more parentally approved folk-tinged music with buddies from church, Page was shaping up for a career in music. Before long, however, he began to set his sights more on the instrument than its output.

After messing around with his dad's nylon-string guitar – taping a cheap microphone to it and rigging an old tape recorder to act as an amplifier of sorts – 14-year-old Page got a part-time job working as a janitor in the oil fields. From there, he saved up enough money to buy cheap Teisco Del Ray guitars and the like from his local pawn shop. "I was trying to get to a Fender," he says. "But I couldn't afford one, so I did what I could to get there."

About a year later, at 15 and with no prior training, Page built his first complete guitar – from scratch. Then, he built another – and another.

"I just kind of looked at what it was," he says, "and figured my way around it. I screwed up a lot of guitars and threw a lot of guitars away. Honestly, though, it was just a matter of not having the money. I started building guitars and cheap amplifiers for myself, lighting systems for the band, stuff like that. It was more from financial necessity than anything else. But because I was in Southern California and Fender was nearby, and all my heroes played Fender, I started applying for work there at the age of 16. They didn't hire me until my 21st birthday, and then that started my life there."

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Page started at the Fullerton factory in 1978. Fender was his higher education, his apprenticeship, and his 'big chance' all rolled into one. Having arrived there as a DIY hacker, he was prepared to pay attention to what the pros could teach him – and to work hard.

"I started off on the floor as a neck buffer," he says, "and within three months I got a job as a model-maker in research and development. That's when I started working with Freddie Tavares and Greg Wilson and everybody else on the R&D team. I was used to hacking stuff together with cheap tools, and here I walked into a shop with really great tools and mills and lathes that I had never dreamed of owning.

"I WAS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND FENDER WAS NEARBY, AND ALL MY HEROES PLAYED FENDER, SO I STARTED APPLYING FOR WORK THERE AT THE AGE OF 16. THEY DIDN'T HIRE ME UNTIL MY 21ST BIRTHDAY, AND THAT STARTED MY LIFE THERE"

"I had all these ideas, so I worked with Greg and Freddie a lot on design. They kind of sculpted me that way, helping me grow. And when Greg left his position after a few years, I got the job as guitar designer. I was 23 years old.

It may have been what got Page ahead so quickly, but swotting so hard didn't fly with everyone on the shop floor. "It was interesting," he says. "I remember the guys on the floor getting mad at me because I was working so hard. 'Hey, slow down, you're going to make us look bad!' I was like, 'I'm not going to stay here buffing necks forever'."

MAGIC BULLET

Early in his tenure as a designer, Page contributed to Fender's reintroduction into the student-guitar market by taking Greg Wilson's initial concept for an affordable US-built model from its design to its release stage. His effort earned him his first patent – for the guitar's combined bridge and pickguard – and brought popular new budget-minded Fenders to market in 1981 in the form of the Bullet series.

"I remember that my directive from the marketing department was to design a guitar that could be made for $65 in standard manufacturing costs," says Page.

ABOVE A John Page Classic AJ model in Pelham Blue, manufactured in Japan under a licensing deal

OPPOSITE Page in his Oregon workshop

“I REALISED THAT MAYBE CUTTING EDGE, FOR ME, DIDN’T HAVE TO BE ABOUT NEW TECHNOLOGY BUT ABOUT TURNING THE CLOCK BACK TO CELEBRATE HUMAN HANDS AGAIN”

ABOVE Page’s first few years in Oregon saw him concentrate on art and custom-made furniture, but he’s all about guitars again now

“I think I came within a dollar of that. I believe it retailed for $199 at the time. So it was a matter of, ‘How can I make the least expensive guitar that’s manufactured here, and use up a lot of parts, Mustang parts and so forth, that are lying around?’

“It was probably one of the most key moments in my life, when I got the call. I was in my office in R&D, which was all the way over on the other side of the factory, with multiple buildings in between, and I got a call from the final line saying, ‘Hey, John, the first run of Bullets is coming through’. So, I go walking down – it’s about a half-mile walk – and I go in and see these racks of 200 or 300 red Bullets, you know? And I just about pee myself. It was a really cool first product, and it’s funny that it’s hip again. A lot of people are collecting Bullets. They’re bringing decent money.”

CUSTOM CREDENTIALS

Having quickly ascended the ranks, Page was already playing a significant role in shaping Fender history. But his biggest part and arguably his greatest contribution to modern electric guitar manufacturing was yet to come. After taking much of 1986 off to work on his own music in the studio, the would-be performer realised he couldn’t carry on without a steady income, and spoke to Fender about returning to work.

“I contacted [then vice president of R&D] Dan Smith and asked him if there were any openings,” says Page. “Dan spoke to [then Fender CEO] Bill Schultz, who gave me a choice of going back to R&D or joining Michael Stevens in opening the Fender Custom Shop. We had discussed the idea of opening a custom shop many years prior but Bill had finally decided to make it happen. I thought that would be pretty cool. I think they gave Michael the chance to yay or nay me and, fortunately, we got along great, thus the partnership began.”

More than just building expensive guitars for star artists and wealthy clients, the Custom Shop – opened in 1987 with Page and Stevens at the helm as master luthiers – helped Fender re-establish its primacy in the guitar world following the rebuilding years of the mid-1980s, and became very much a showpiece for the storied guitar-maker et al.

Upon Stevens’ departure in 1990, Page took over as head of the Custom Shop. By now, the operation that began as a small loss leader of sorts, operating in an 800 sq ft corner of the Corona factory, was on its way to becoming a 30,000 sq ft facility with 60 dedicated employees. Come the end of the decade, however, Page’s heart was no longer in it.

“To be honest – and I don’t like to say anything negative – but management and I just couldn’t agree,” says Page. “I mean, we didn’t agree for a long time [laughs] but I thought we’d been really successful, from this little seed of an idea to making, at that point, about $65 million in sales a year. We had become pretty much the premier custom shop in the world. Then they moved us from our own separate facility to a shop inside the factory, which was something I fought heavily against. Ultimately, I am a man driven by the passion of an artist. Without passion in my work, I do not operate. Simply put, the passion left me.”

In 1998, Page made a soft departure into the role of executive director of the Fender Museum of Music and the Arts Foundation, which included the Kids Rock Free programme, a project for which he has expressed much enthusiasm. Five years later, having taken the Foundation successfully through its launch and establishment, he departed for Oregon to work with his hands again.

FROM ART TO GUITARS

For his first few years in Oregon, Page worked strictly on his art and custom-furniture projects. Then a student from a nearby high school, who had read a profile of the former Fender Custom Shop director in the local newspaper, got in touch to say he was building a guitar for his senior woodworking project, and asked if Page would mentor him.

“I thought, ‘Well, that’s kind of cool but I don’t have any parts or anything’,” says Page. “I had nothing. But working with him reignited the spark in me. I visited the Custom Shop shortly after that and saw some things I wasn’t really thrilled about. It wasn’t that they were doing anything wrong, it was just that I missed that start-to-finish, one-guy-hand-building-guitars kind of thing.

ABOVE John Page putting his experienced hands to work on some f-hole detailing

"For years, I had said, 'I'm not going to get back into the industry until I can do cutting-edge new technology'. Then I realised that maybe cutting edge, for me, didn't have to be about new technology but about turning the clock back. Not to, like, celebrate vintage, that wasn't my thing, but just to celebrate human hands again. To say, 'You know what? I'm going to build my guitars and I'm going to be honest about what I build and what I don't build. I'm going to take as long as I want to design it and build it the way I want'. That's why I got back into it.

"It's not just me," Page continues. "There are lots of builders who have that same commitment and desire. But, from my background and coming from the Fender corporate background, it was unique. And that's why I set myself up the way I did: low cost of living, own my own shop out in the forest, I can build the way I want to and not worry, 'Oh, I've got to make this nut every month to survive', and that deal.

"I was getting around that, finding out what my goal was, and then it all changed: 'Let me make all the changes I wanted to make on Fenders but couldn't back then. How would I design the Strat today? How would I design the Tele today? What do I like and what don't I like?' To not be shackled to a vintage, almost religious commitment to things meant I could change stuff like the reverse-angle [bridge] pickup. 'That's sacrilege!' No, it's not, man – listen to how much better it sounds with the pickup angled the other way!"

ADDING THE SPARKLE

Returning to elements of the traditional bolt-neck design ethos, Page has applied his own artistic eye to the body styles, while taking on new and better ways of bolting it all together – literally, in some cases – to achieve enhanced renditions of the classics, while striving for that intimacy that he himself seeks in a guitar. Notable among these is his system of using threaded inserts in his necks, with bolts to attach them, rather than wood screws into raw wood, as per the original vintage Fender archetype.

"This is not some brand-new miraculous system that I came up with on my own though," says Page. "I fell in love with the whole neck-bolts-and-inserts system when the Custom Shop took over the Kubicki bass manufacturing from Phil Kubicki in 1990. I really liked what it added to the bass but I didn't really like that it was a steel insert. I love the sound of brass more than steel, so I choose to use a brass insert myself. Tonally, I think it adds this high-end sparkle and complexity of overtones that normally isn't there. People like to talk about the 'twang' of a Fender; I like that but not the ice-pick twang. By reversing the angle of the [bridge] pickup, I sweetened that, and by putting those neck bolts in there, I added the sparkle above that twang, which I hear as a crispness, a pleasantness, and not an ear-splitting kind of tone."

Having returned somewhat to the ethos of the Fender Bullet models of almost 40 years ago – though with a major upgrade in the overall veracity of both design and construction – Page has also created a range of John Page Classic models, manufactured in Japan under a licensing deal with Howard Swimmer, a former partner in the now-defunct Premier Builders Guild operation.

"I'm really happy with those guitars," says Page. "I build very limited [Custom] guitars and that's purposeful because I want to build the way I want to build. They're also expensive, so that cuts off a large portion of the populous that might want to play my guitars. The Classics offer that more affordable option. I'm real happy to do that. It's kind of like going back to some of the things I did at Fender. I love what I do now, building guitars here."

Find out more at johnpageguitars.com

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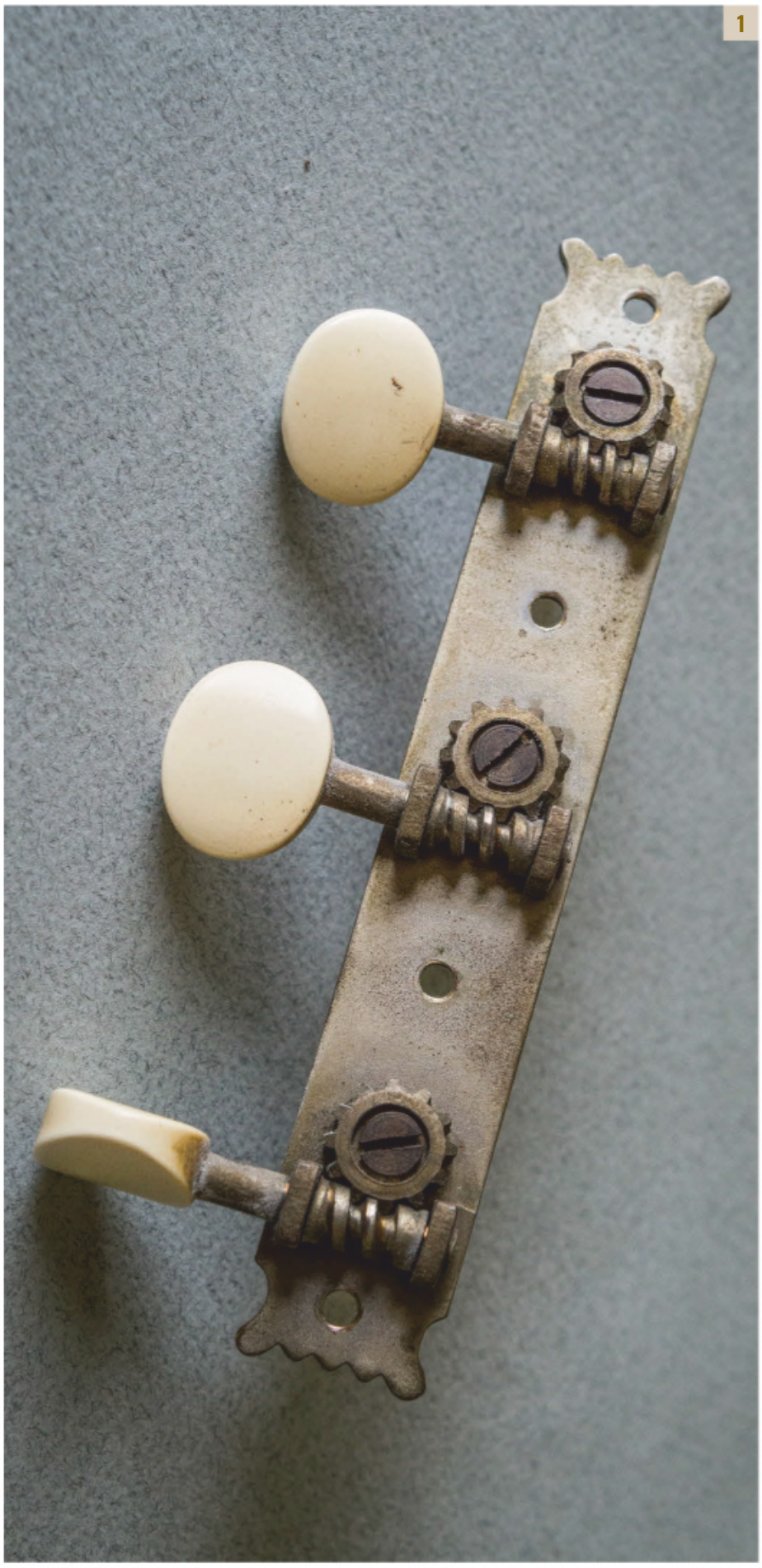
DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO MAKE OLD GUITARS PLAY AND STAY IN TUNE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Achieving accurate and stable tuning is rarely straightforward, especially if an old guitar has been neglected. Here, we show you how to tackle two of the main offenders when it comes to tuning woes: the infamous Bigsby vibrato and the tuners themselves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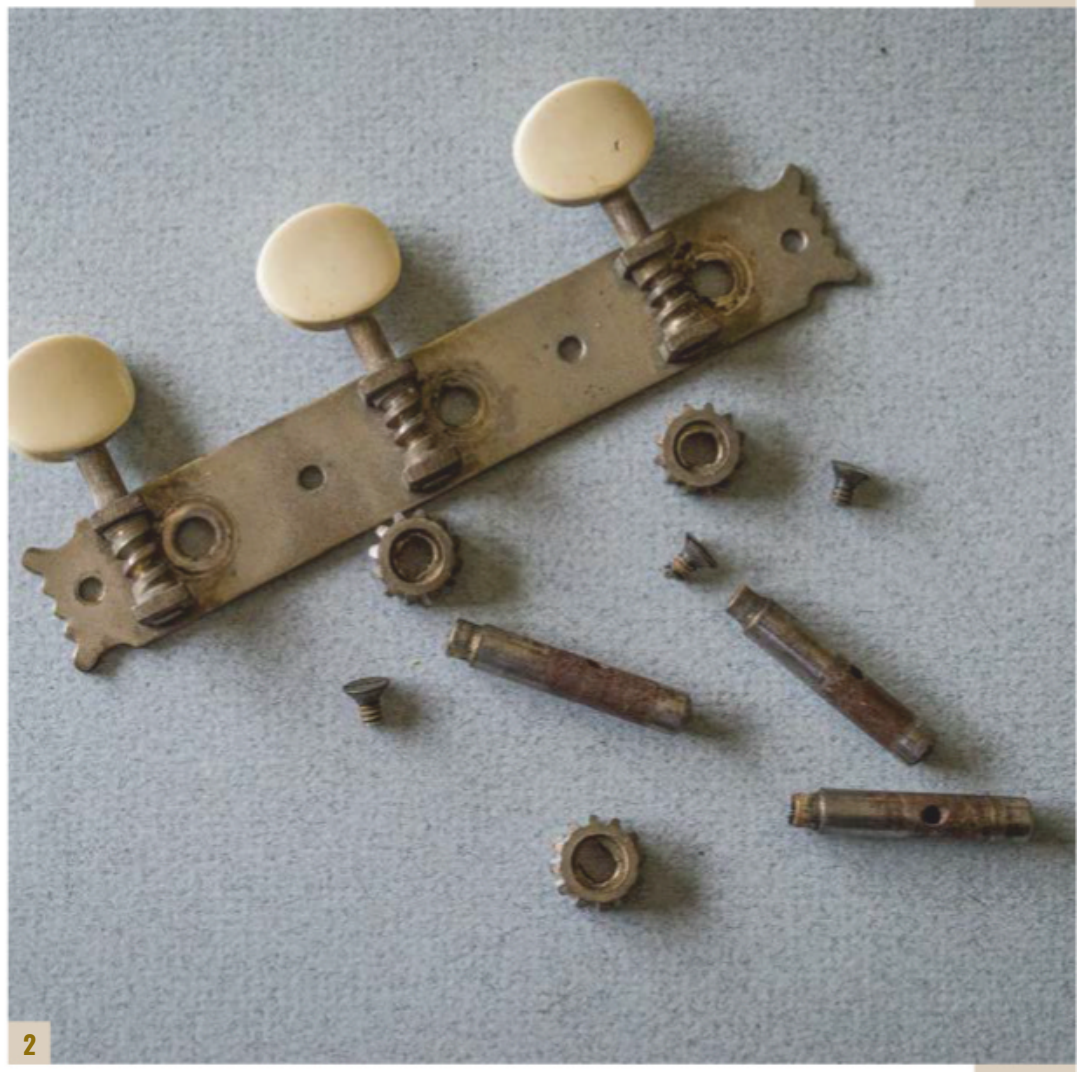
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It may be helpful in a creative context, but friction is your enemy when it comes to keeping your guitars in tune. The vast majority of tuning issues are caused by friction at the nut. Strings cannot move freely through poorly cut or badly worn nut slots, which is why locking-vibrato designs such as the Floyd Rose dispensed with conventional nuts altogether.

Nut work is tricky. It requires specialist tools and is generally best left to experienced guitar techs. But friction can be an issue in other areas, too. Here, I'll be addressing tuner and vibrato servicing. Practically everything here can be carried out by any competent amateur tech with a bit of DIY experience, and avoiding unnecessary hardware replacement will save you a lot of money in the long run.

Over time guitar tuners can stiffen up, get sloppy and loose or, occasionally, even seize up completely. Replacing worn Klusons with Grovers and Schallers was in the past common practice on old guitars but, in my experience, old tuners can usually be made operational again and will tune up more accurately and hold tune better than before.

This is true for most old machineheads, but it's worth distinguishing between the types of tuners found on vintage and on modern guitars. Prior to the 1970s, most guitars were fitted with open-geared or Kluson-style tuners. More upmarket models were fitted with sealed types, also known as die-cast tuners, which are found on most modern guitars, too.

With open-gear types, the workings are visible, and they are actually the easiest to service and maintain. Klusons and F-stamped Fender tuners conceal their working parts under covers. The idea behind die-cast tuners is that the lubrication for the parts is sealed inside a casing, which prevents them from getting clogged with dust and dirt.

TOP GEARS

To refresh open-gear tuners, they should first be taken off the headstock – just be careful not to lose the screws. The rear of the tuner post will have a screw that holds it in position and locks it together with the round gear. This gear meshes with a worm that is machined into the shaft that leads to the button. Simply remove the gear screw and you should be able to dismantle the tuner, leaving the worm in place.

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1 These century-old tuners from a Washburn parlour guitar feel stiff and uneven

2 With the three gear screws removed, the tuner posts pull apart from the gears, leaving the worm in situ

3 Compare the polished gear in the centre with the other two

4 Reassembly in process, with PTFE lubricant applied to all parts that move against one another

5 Kluson tuner servicing begins with a naphtha bath, with the plastic buttons kept clear of the liquid

6 After soaking and flushing with naphtha, inject lithium grease via the lubrication hole in the casing above the 'deluxe' lettering

From there, it's simply a case of cleaning the metal parts to remove all traces of grease and dirt, polishing the parts with chrome cleaner, and then reassembling with fresh lubricant applied to any parts that move against each other, including the gear and worm, the post shaft where it contacts the tuner plate, and at the opening of the bushing on the front of the headstock.

This is all simple stuff and no specialist tools are required, but you do need to use the correct type of lubricant. Forget about WD-40, 3-In-One Oil, Vaseline and car grease. Liquids won't stay where they're needed and grease will stay wet and simply attract dirt and dust. In hot conditions, the grease may even liquify and seep into your guitar's finish – or worse still, the bare wood inside the tuner-post holes.

Instead, you can use a PTFE lubricant, microscopic particles of Teflon carried in a liquid solvent. After the lubricant is applied, the solvent evaporates to leave the slippery Teflon particles where they're needed and, since the area remains fairly dry, it doesn't clog up with dirt. You can find PTFE lubricant online and in most DIY stores. Prices vary dramatically, depending on the brand, and it's available in both squeezy bottles and aerosols.

CLEANING KLUSONS

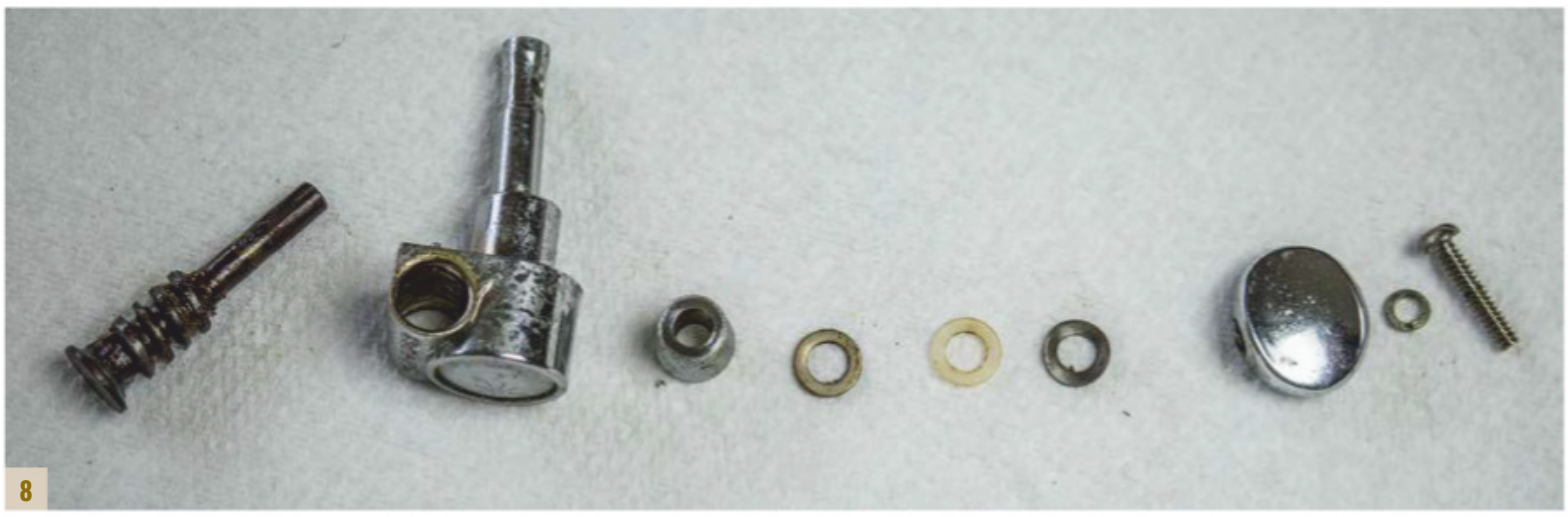
Kluson tuners are by far and away the most common machinehead brand seen on US guitars made prior to the 1970s. Repros have now been available for so long that some would surely qualify as vintage themselves. Whether your Kluson-style tuners are six or 60 years old, the cleaning procedure is identical.

A Kluson is an open-gear tuner with a cover fitted over the workings. The cover is largely cosmetic; it doesn't create a seal between itself and the backplate, and dirt can still get inside. Klusons may take a little longer to clog up than open gears, but most will eventually.

Another difference is that, at the factory, rather than oil, grease was applied to the worm and gear – or, occasionally, no lubrication would be applied whatsoever. On all but the earliest examples, Kluson covers have a lubrication hole for easy maintenance, but surprisingly few guitar players seem to be aware of this.

All you need is a bottle of naphtha (aka lighter fluid), a syringe and lithium grease.

7 Grover tuners such as this were often retrofitted to vintage guitars – this one comes from a ’56 LP Special



8 The constituent parts of the Grover are spread out in the order they came off, but the nylon and flat metal washers are actually the wrong way around

9 The worm is caked in dry, sticky, rotten grease that can be cleaned off with acetone and should be re-greased before reassembly

10 The circlip washer must be removed to draw out the pin roller

11 Circlip pliers such as these are the best tool for the job, and so cheap that they’re a no-brainer purchase

12 The string pins must also be removed but to do so the grub screws come out first

13 With all the grub screws and string pins out, the bar can now be removed from the main casting

Place the tuners in a small container, such as an empty jar or aerosol cap, and pour the naphtha over them. I always leave the tuner buttons uppermost – especially if they’re plastic – because I don’t want to risk damaging them. Just make sure the naphtha is deep enough to submerge all the casings and leave the tuners there to soak for a couple of hours.

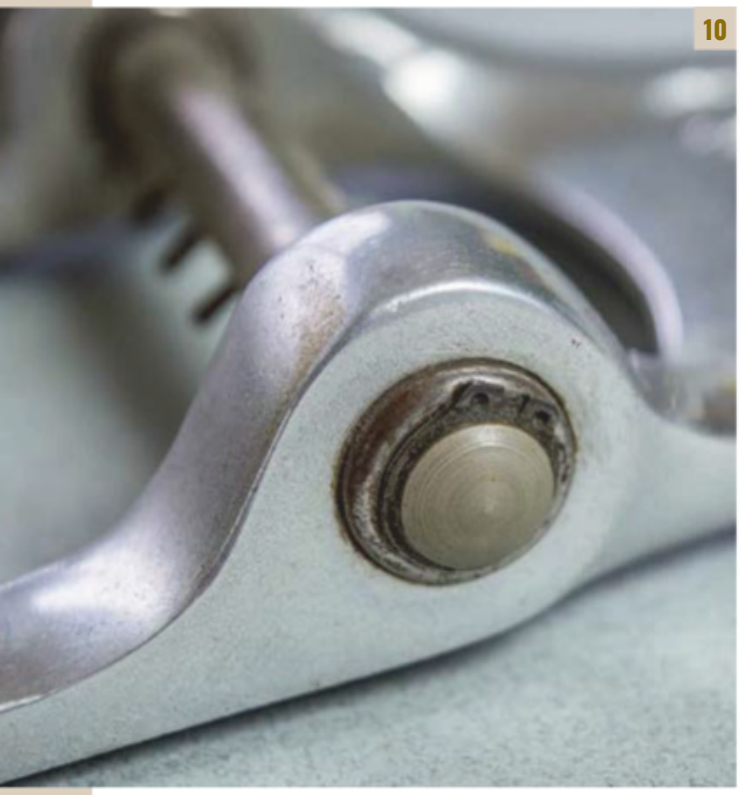
Remove the tuners from the liquid and place them on some kitchen paper. You’ll probably notice that the naphtha will have changed from clear to a greyish or brownish colour, and particles and debris may have settled at the bottom of the container.

Fill the syringe with fresh naphtha and hold one of the tuners over a plastic tub – used takeaway containers are ideal for this. Press the opening of the syringe over the lubrication hole, or into it if it’s thin enough, and force the naphtha into the casing. This should flush out any remaining dirt and metal particles. Go ahead and repeat this process until you’re confident that the tuner is completely flushed out, then set it aside as you do the rest.

I use lithium grease for Klusons because it has a high melting point and, unlike Vaseline and auto grease, it won’t liquify and run into the finish and wood during hot weather. You should avoid using silicone grease because it may damage the guitar’s finish. Squeeze some lithium grease into a syringe and force it into the tuner casing via the lubrication hole – just as Kluson intended. This can get messy so keep some kitchen paper on hand and be prepared to clean up afterwards.

Next, grip the tuner gently in a vice – or your hand if you don’t have one – and use a string winder to turn the tuner and work the grease through the mechanism. Continue until you see the grease working its way out of the casing. By that point the tuner should be turning freely, so give it a final wipe down and it’ll be ready to go back onto the guitar.

You may need to follow up with another wipe or two over the next few days as everything settles down and any excess grease works its way out of the casings. After that, your Klusons should be good for at least a couple of years. And if your Klusons aren’t actually vintage, you can probably bypass the naphtha flush and simply squeeze in a bit of lithium grease once every few years.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BREAKING THE SEAL

Here, I'm working on an old set of Grovers, but all die-cast tuners are much the same and dismantling them for servicing is quite straightforward. Simply remove the screw and washer from the end of the button, then lift off the button followed by the three tiny washers. Take care not to lose them and note the order in which they are fitted on the shaft. If one or more of these washers goes missing, you will need to replace it.

With these Grovers, there's a spacer to remove before the tuner worm can be pushed out of the casing. If you take a look inside, you should be able to see the state of the gear – in this case, it's caked in hardened grease. Clean this off with some acetone and a cotton bud, along with the inside of the tuner casing. Apply some fresh lithium grease to the tuner worm and the gear, which can be accessed inside the casing.

From there, reassembly is simply the reverse of disassembly, with the addition of some grease or PTFE lubricant between the washers. The refurbished tuner should feel solid but smooth. Any looseness or sloppiness, which can often be an issue with sealed tuners, should be gone too.

Even if you don't fancy stripping one of these tuners down completely, it may still be worthwhile removing the button and lubricating the three washers. You should be able to tighten the button screw sufficiently enough to eliminate any sloppiness and still have the tuner rotate with ease. To finish, always tune up to pitch rather than down to pitch, regardless of the type or condition of your tuners.

FREE BAR

An enormous percentage of players experience tuning problems when it comes to vibrato bridges and tailpieces. Here, I'm focusing on Bigsbys – you can find plenty of maintenance advice for other types of vibratos on *Guitar.com*.

Though they are much maligned and misunderstood, Bigsby vibratos are well-engineered devices that require quite little maintenance. But, after several decades of use, you may find that they can feel a bit stiff and that they may not return to pitch quite as well as they should.

You can assess your Bigsby at the same time as changing your strings. With all the strings removed, try raising and lowering the arm to determine how the pin bar is moving. If there's a front roller, try spinning that too.

14 With the bar removed, it's easy to see the dirt and sticky grease at both ends

15 The main casting has two roller bearings for the pin bar, and it should be cleaned and re-greased

16 Both ends of the pin bar are cleaned with acetone and polished with Autosol

17 Inside this hole, there's a grub screw, which must be removed before the front roller bar can be pushed out

18 The front roller bar is being drawn out of the casting

19 The roller bar has been cleaned and polished, and the bearings at the ends of the roller cleaned and re-greased

Both should move freely and without any friction. If they don't, then the grease in the roller bearings has probably decayed and become sticky, so it's time for a clean.

Fortunately for us, Paul Bigsby designed his products in an era when things were generally repaired rather than replaced, and it's pretty easy to strip down a Bigsby. The B7 on my 1962 Gibson ES-330 has probably been on the guitar since it was new, and a service is long overdue.

I begin by removing the circlip at the bass end of the pin bar. It's the only part that requires a special tool – a set of circlip pliers costs just £4.99 at Screwfix. Once the circlip is off, I use an Allen key to remove the grub screws that hold the string pins in place. The pins then push through the holes and the pin roller slides out of the main casting.

There are two roller bearings pushed into the casting and, like the pin bar, they're all gummed up and sticky. I clean everything off with acetone and cotton buds, and then polish the ends of the pin bar with Autosol, before applying lithium grease to the roller bearings and then pushing the pin bar back through the bearings.

With the circlip back in place and holding everything together, the mechanism feels far smoother and looser. The pins and plugs are replaced and, for many Bigsbys, that would be job done. But I also need to take a look at the front roller.

The mechanism employs a captive bar that's held in position by another grub screw. The roller is actually a metal tube with roller bearings at each end that slide over the bar. So, using the same Allen key as before, I remove the grub screw, slide the bar out of the casting and release the roller.

Here, the decayed grease feels like wet glue and, to dissolve it, I soak the roller in acetone, which also removes the grease from the bar. Once the parts have dried, I apply some lithium grease to the roller bearings and reassemble the whole thing. Servicing the Bigsby B7 takes me about an hour and, once I'm done, it feels like new. Hopefully it should be good for another decade or so of atmospheric wobbling.

Achieving rock-solid tuning is a complex task and there are countless factors at play throughout. While it might seem like a lot of effort, servicing your tuners and Bigsby is immensely satisfying, will help enormously, and will almost certainly improve your guitars. Why not give it a go? G

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ADVERT ARTWORK

AMPLIFIER FAQ

In the latest instalment of his column, Rift Amplification's Chris Fantana tackles the thorny issue of amp servicing

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

Hi Chris,
People talk a lot about needing to have amps serviced. How many miles should an amp have on the clock before it needs the attention of a tech and what does an amp service entail?
GARETH, SUFFOLK

Hi, Gareth. That's a subject on which every amp tech seems to have a different opinion. Some say amplifiers should be serviced regularly to ensure reliability and to catch potential issues early on, while others follow the old adage, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". I think they're both equally valid, depending on the amplifier itself, your intended use for it, and its current condition.

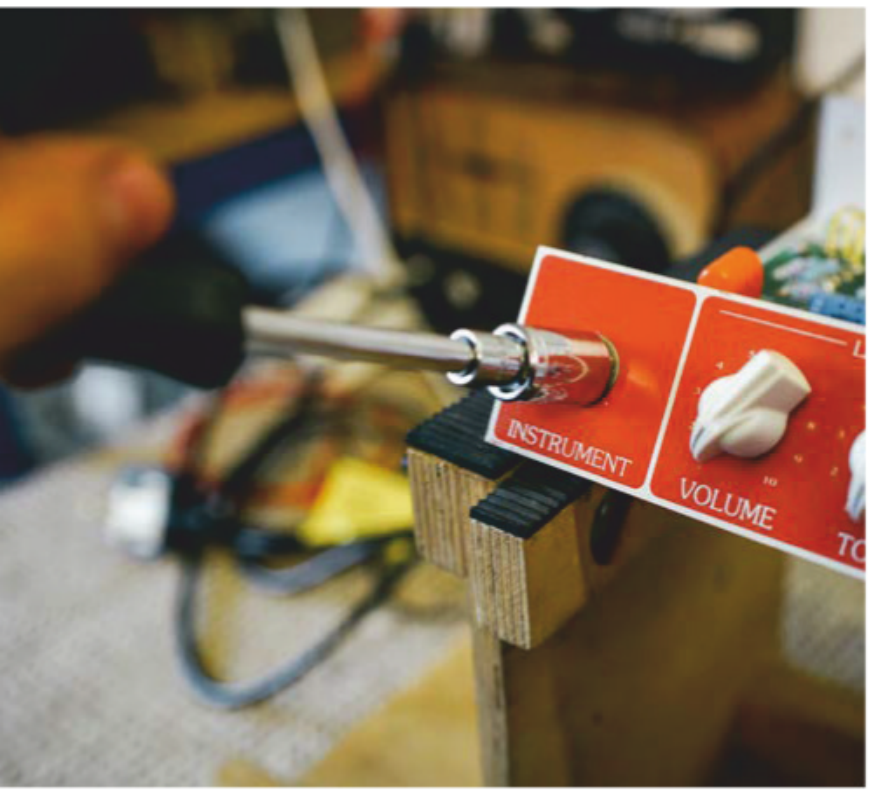
I sit on the preventative-maintenance side of the fence, knowing that speaker vibration, travel, and usage can cause things to come loose and components to drift in value, and wear out. There's nothing worse than your amplifier cutting in and out during an important gig because you didn't tighten up the input sockets.

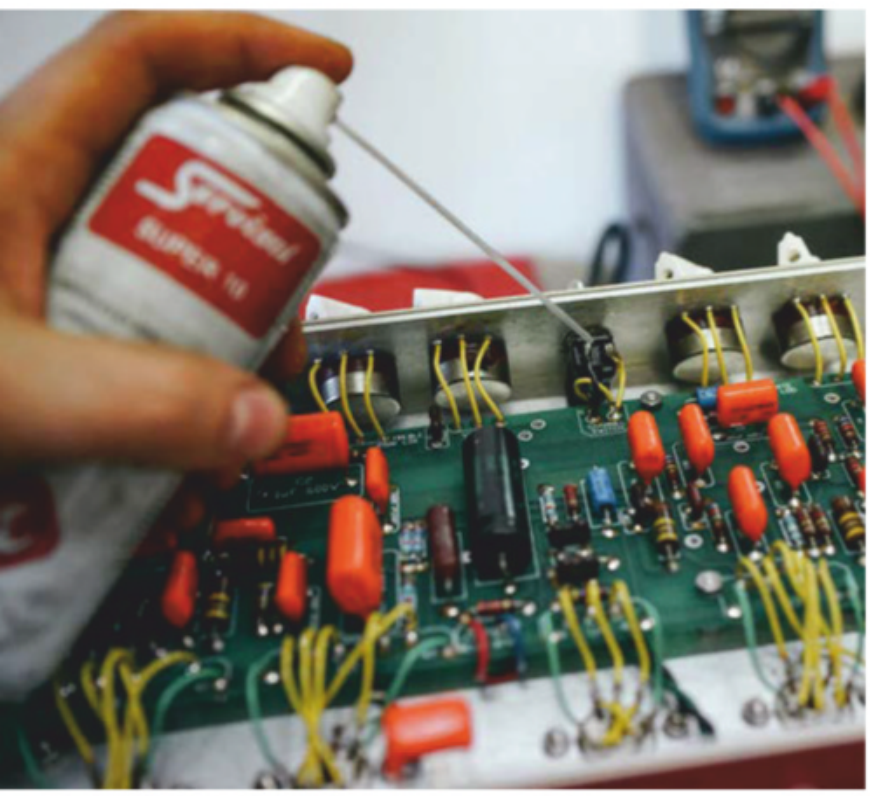
Even if you're just playing at home, I recommend having your amplifier PAT (Portable Appliance Test) tested once a year. It only costs a few quid and will see someone competent ensure that your amp is at least safe to plug into a mains socket. Many venues and rehearsal spaces require evidence of PAT testing before you can plug in, so it's worth having it done.

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

What is actually done during an amplifier service? Providing that the customer hasn't complained of a particular issue, most technicians will follow a simple six-step process:

LOOK The tech will inspect both the exterior and interior, looking for anything out of the ordinary. Mains cable hanging by a thread? Any broken switches or sockets? Valves/tubes all present and correct? Any burnt resistors, leaking caps or loose wires?





LISTEN If safe to do so, the tech will plug the amplifier in and give it a listen. Do all of the controls operate as expected? Are there any unwanted noises, like pops or hums? They'll need to plug in and play to confirm.

TIGHTEN The tech will check that all the potentiometer nuts, sockets, switches, grounding points and anything else that should be tight are, and remedy as required.

CLEAN Noisy switches, sockets and potentiometers can cause all sorts of problems but the tech should be able to clean these up with a cleaning agent like Servisol.

TEST The tech will test the valves, check the bias of the output valves and adjust if necessary. The full operating conditions of these should be checked too.

FIX If anything else need sorting out, now would be a good time to get it done. After finishing with a PAT test and a play test, your amp should be good to go.

A well-maintained amp is a good-performing one. I have customers who find that the peace of mind they get from having their amplifier regularly serviced far outweighs the costs, while others just aren't so fussed. I charge just an hour's labour for a service like this – most small issues can be fixed within that time frame. Any additional servicing would result in a phone call to the customer before proceeding.

If you're the lucky owner of a vintage amplifier, I'd recommend it checked over at least once a year. I once had to replace a very expensive blown power transformer on a vintage Fender Bassman after a filter capacitor had failed. The owner refused to let anyone touch the amp and insisted on still playing it, but the resulting loss in value, which results when you replace a transformer in a vintage amp, taught him a lesson he'll never forget.

If you're still unsure, talk to your local amp tech and run through the available options. You might just save yourself a costly repair bill. G

Visit riftamps.com to find out more about Rift's range of British-built, handwired valve amplifiers

This Tone King Imperial is in for a service – note nuts being tightened, Servisol being sprayed and the erm, slightly overdue PAT test

Page onstage with Led Zeppelin
in Copenhagen, February 1970

© Jorgen Angel / Redferns / Getty Images

ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART 15 PLAY BLUES LIKE JIMMY PAGE

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

The Led Zeppelin icon's influence on rock guitar is impossible to overstate, but at the core of his signature style were some classic blues fundamentals

From his beginnings as a session ace, to sharing guitar duties with Jeff Beck in The Yardbirds, to redefining rock music as the creative fulcrum of Led Zeppelin, Jimmy Page's contribution to guitar was as groundbreaking as it is enduring.

But whether he was strapping on a Tele, his iconic '59 Les Paul or the double-neck Gibson EDS-1275, his style remained fundamentally rooted in the blues. If it wasn't for a young Page hearing Lonnie Donegan's 1955 hit *Rock Island Line*, he might never have picked up a guitar at all, and a huge part of his musical education came from tracing his favourite Elvis tracks back to their blues roots.

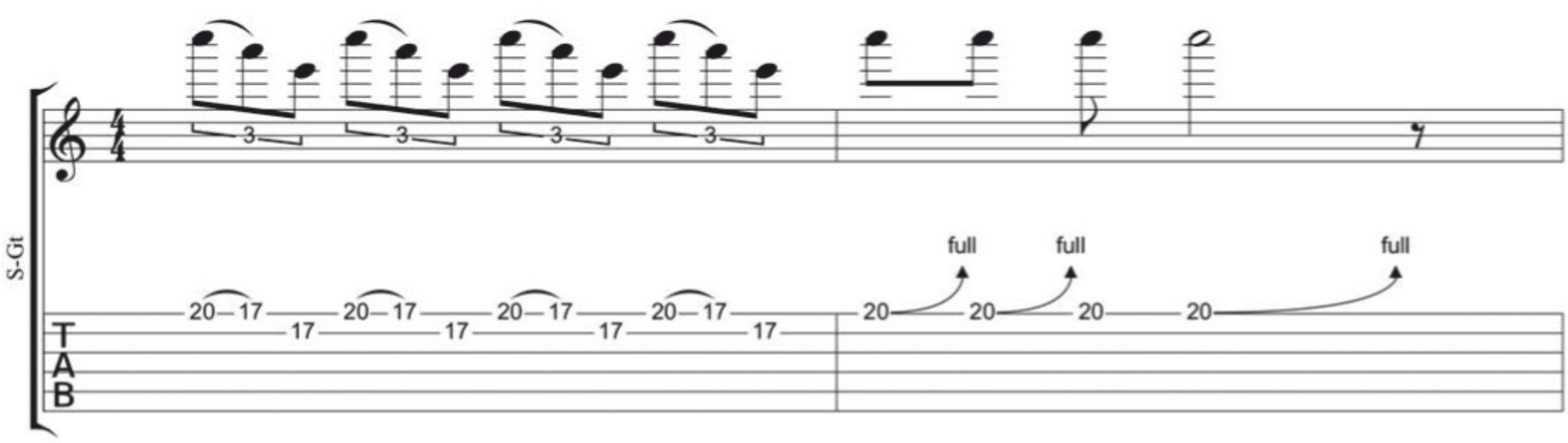
What Page would go on to do with those blues fundamentals would change the landscape of popular music forever. Here we examine five examples of how he fused the blues with rock to fashion something altogether different.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and musician from Swansea, UK. He has taught students via the MGR Music platform, and has worked as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher for more than 10 years. Visit mgrmusic.com for more.

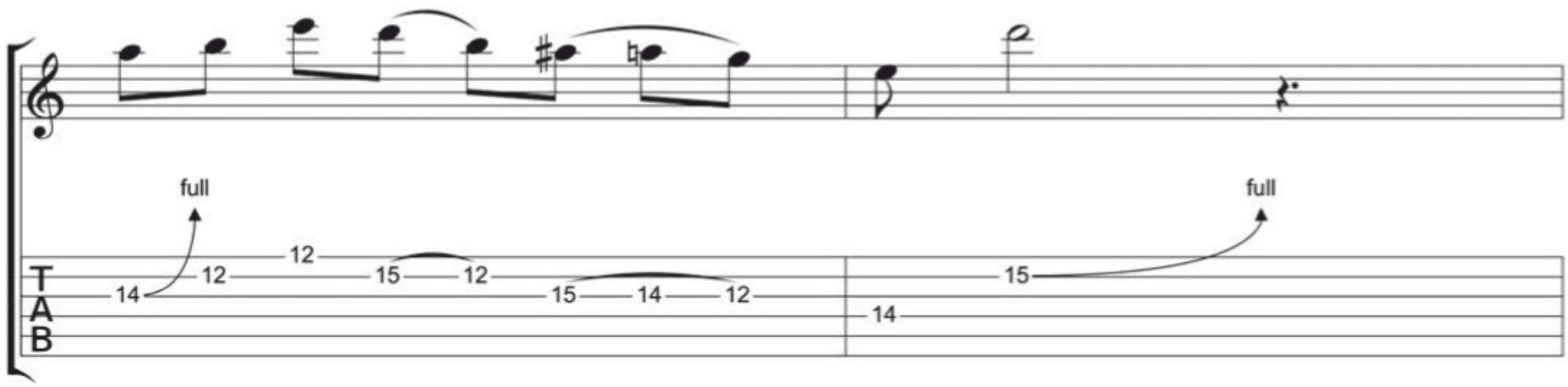
LICK 1

This first lick uses the A minor pentatonic, starting at the dizzy heights of the 17th fret. This is a fast flurry of triplets made up of a pull-off on the E string and a single fretted note on the B string.



LICK 2

This is a rock lick using the E natural minor scale. The natural minor scale is a pentatonic minor with two additional notes. In this case, the additional note is at the 15th fret on the G string. The lick begins with an ascending run before coming back down through a series of pull-offs. Watch out for the three-note pull-off on the G string, which can be tricky to play at speed.

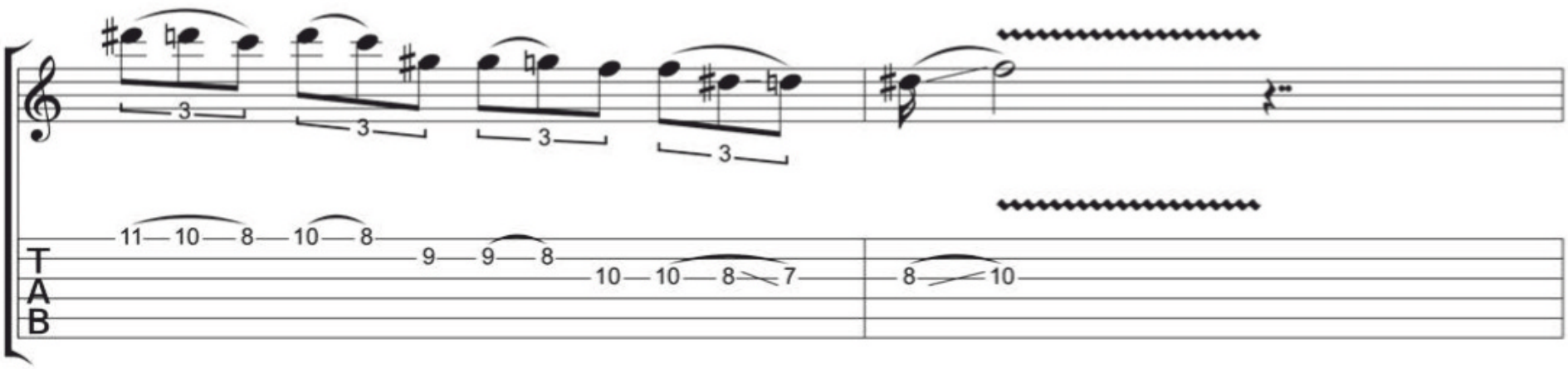


LICK 3

This is a typical 1970s Page-style lick that uses the A minor pentatonic. You'll notice that the first bar is all 16th notes, which means it's straight, but pay attention to the groupings. It's split into three groups of six that each descend before jumping back up again. You're still playing in straight 16ths (four to a beat) but each phrase is six notes long, meaning it crosses two beats. Descending groups of six notes across a four-beat bar can be tricky to master, so start slow. The final two notes of the last grouping cross into the second bar.

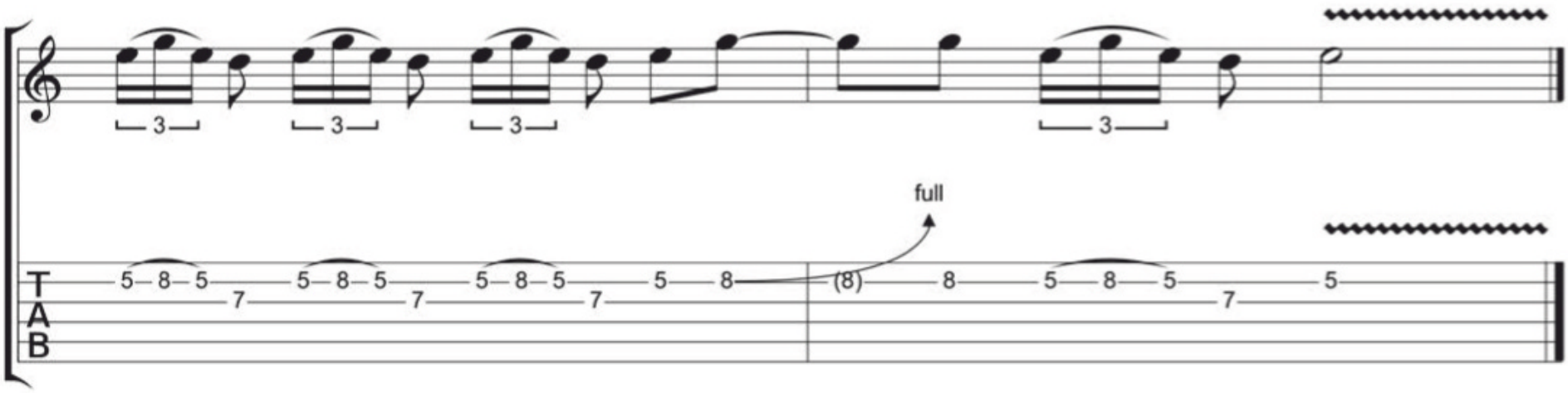
LICK 4

In this lick, we are moving to the key of C and using the natural minor scale. The 10th fret on the E, 9th fret on the B, and 7th fret on the G are all notes that would fall outside the standard C minor pentatonic shape. This is a bluesy ballad-style lick that should be played with plenty of feel. The first bar is descending triplets with a few doubled-up notes over the last two beats. Don't worry about the triplets being sharp – strive for feel over precision here.



LICK 5

Our final example is another up-tempo A minor lick that uses some fast 16th-note triplets. In the first bar, the 16th-note triplets occupy half a beat, while the fretted 7th fret note occupies the other half. You're fitting four notes across each beat but the triplet gives it a more frantic feel.



TRY IT YOURSELF

Each lick in this lesson is based in the minor pentatonic or natural minor scales, across a range of keys. They are all transposable, work well at many tempos, and have a slew of applications. Use them in your own lead playing to channel Jimmy Page.

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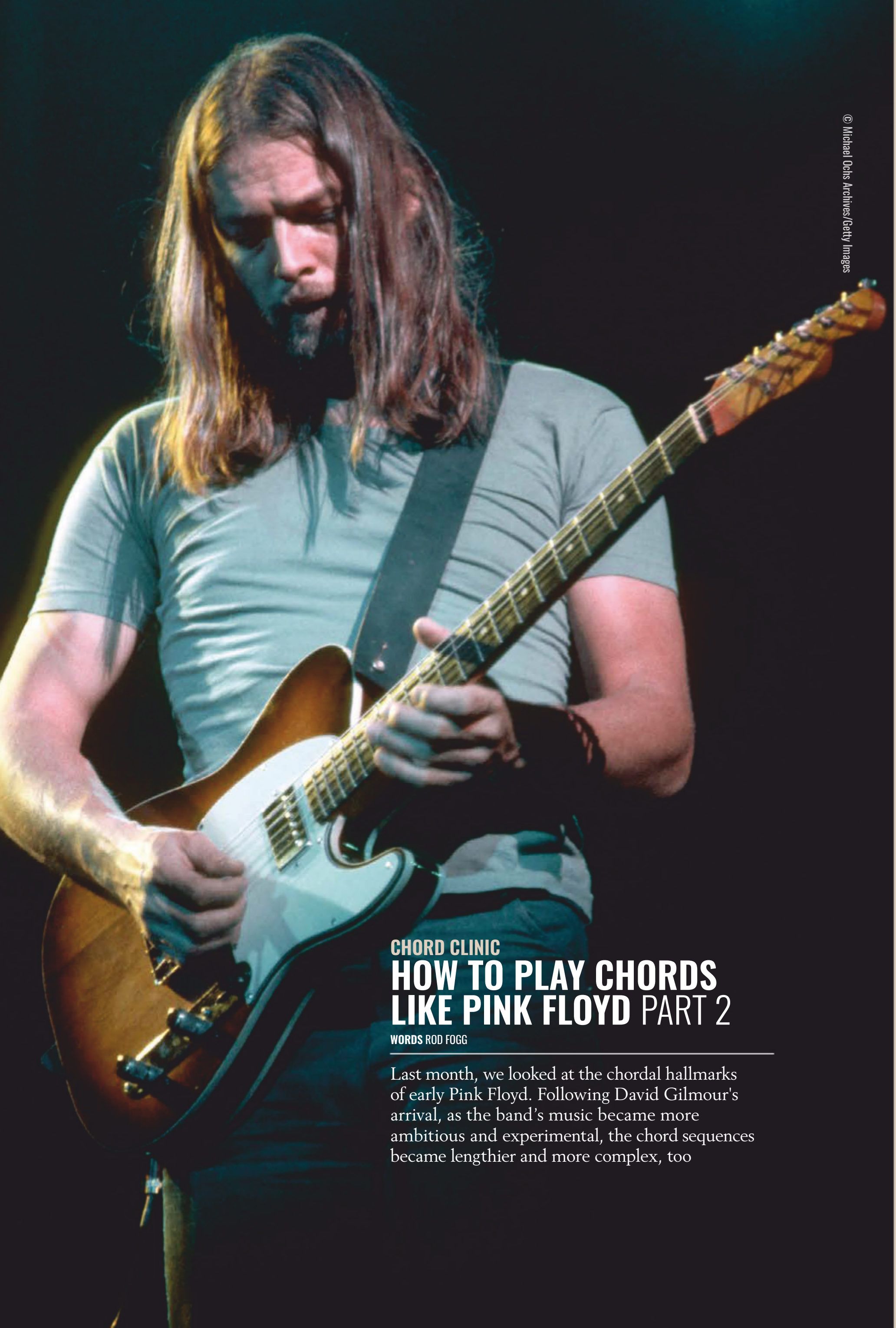

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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE PINK FLOYD PART 2

WORDS ROD FOGG

Last month, we looked at the chordal hallmarks of early Pink Floyd. Following David Gilmour's arrival, as the band's music became more ambitious and experimental, the chord sequences became lengthier and more complex, too

FIGURE 1

As we kick off in the somewhat guitar-unfriendly key of C# minor, we're likely to be faced with more than a few barre chords. On the positive side, this gives us an opportunity to take a closer look at how barre chords work. Strummed slowly and gently, you could think of this as a repeated four-bar sequence, with the G#sus4 and G# in the final bar. The C#m chord here avoids the barre by muting the two E strings with the tip and base of the first finger. You could also try it with a barre at the fourth fret, but we like the more concise four-note version. Notice that the middle two chords are the same shape, moved down the guitar. This malleability is one of the barre chord's greatest assets.

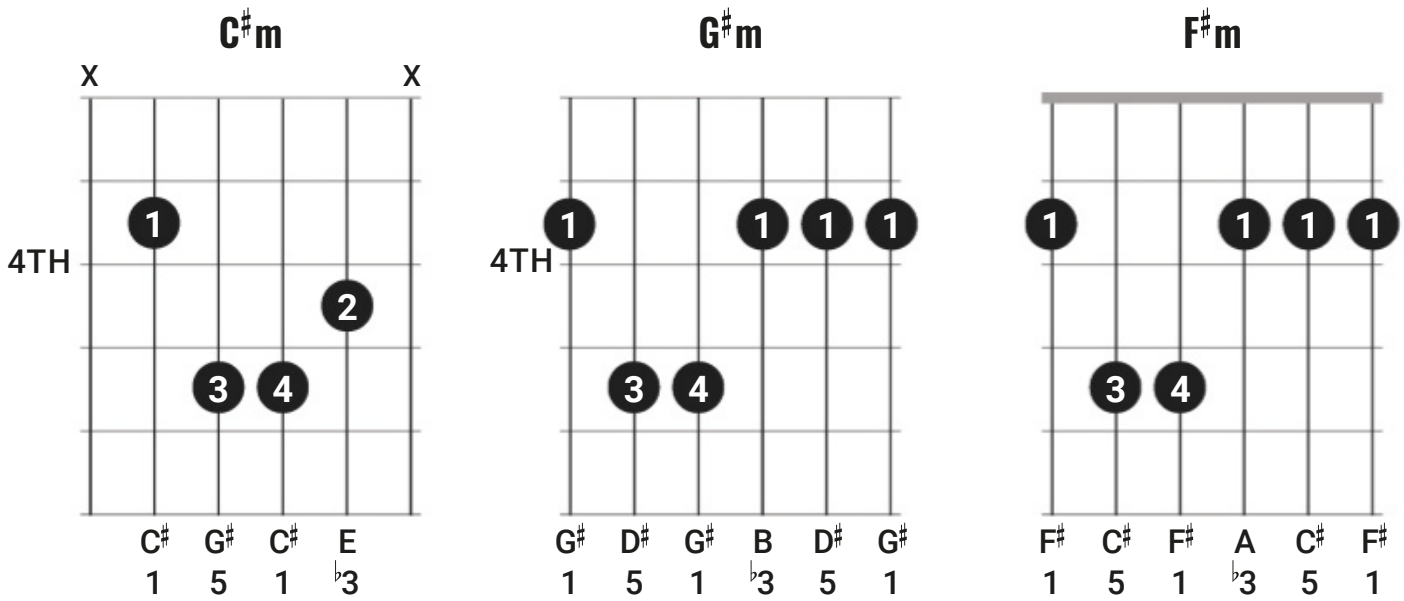
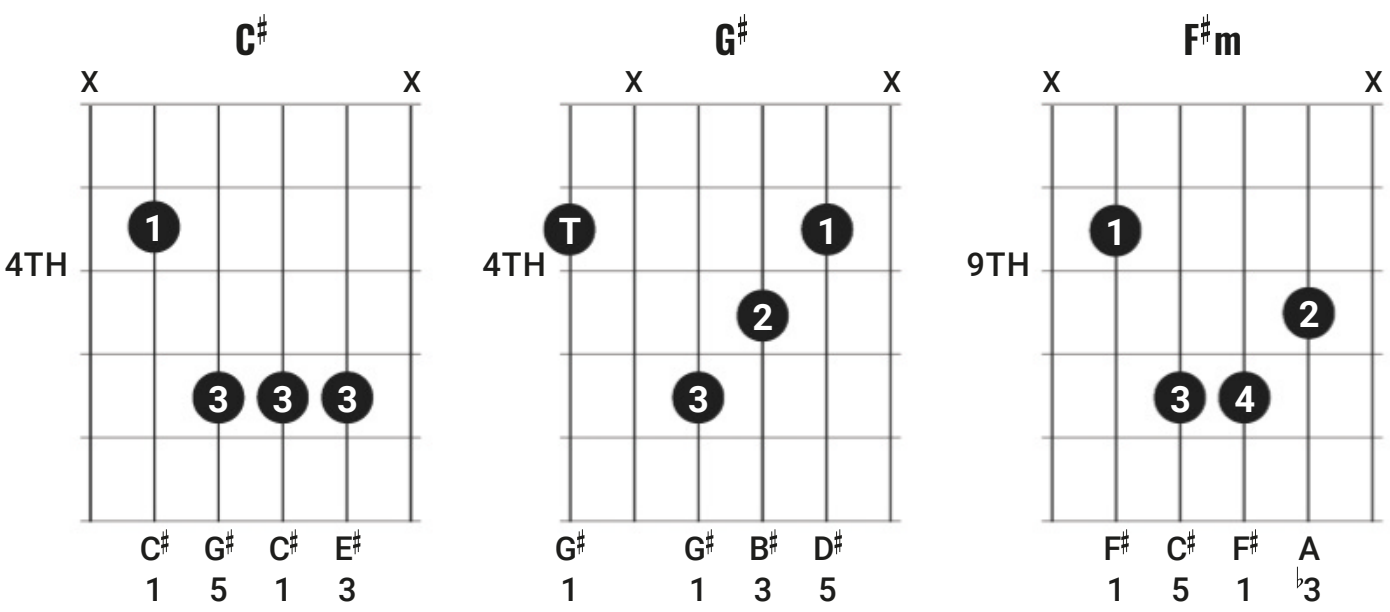


FIGURE 2

As in figure 1, the first three chords of figure 2 are given a bar each, with the G# and A chords sharing the fourth. We have deliberately re-voiced the G# major chord from the shape used in figure 1; as before, we like this concise version with the thumb-over for its clarity and punch. You'll notice that the C#m chord in figure 1 and the C# major chord in figure 2 are similar. This is because only one note needs to change to turn a minor into a major chord. In this case, the minor third, E, becomes the major third, E#. You might be able to spot a similar change between G#m and G# major, as B natural becomes B#. When we reach the fourth chord in this section, we have yet another G# major voicing, this time with the first finger up at the 11th fret. Notice that the C#, G# and A chords are all based on the same shape, each chord taking its name from the note beneath the first finger on the A string



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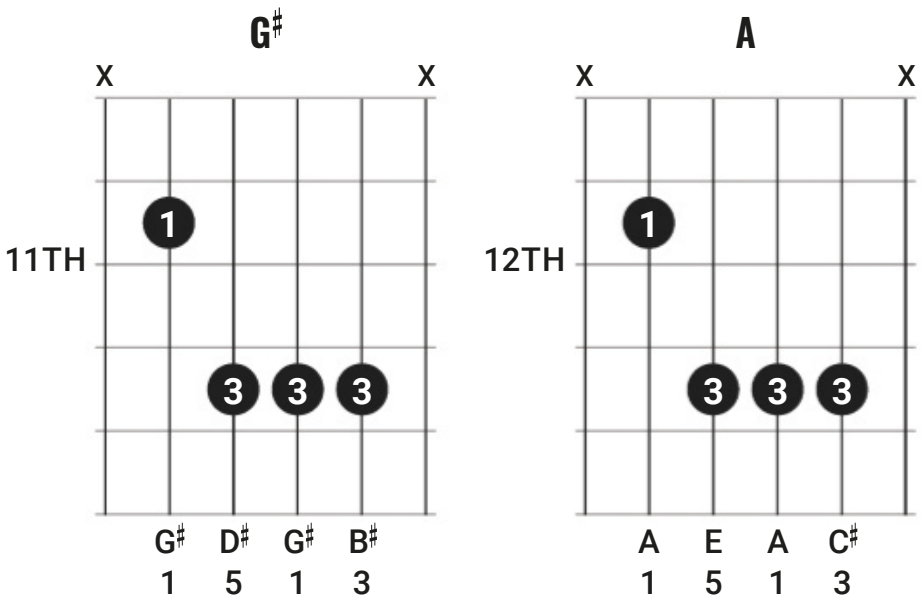
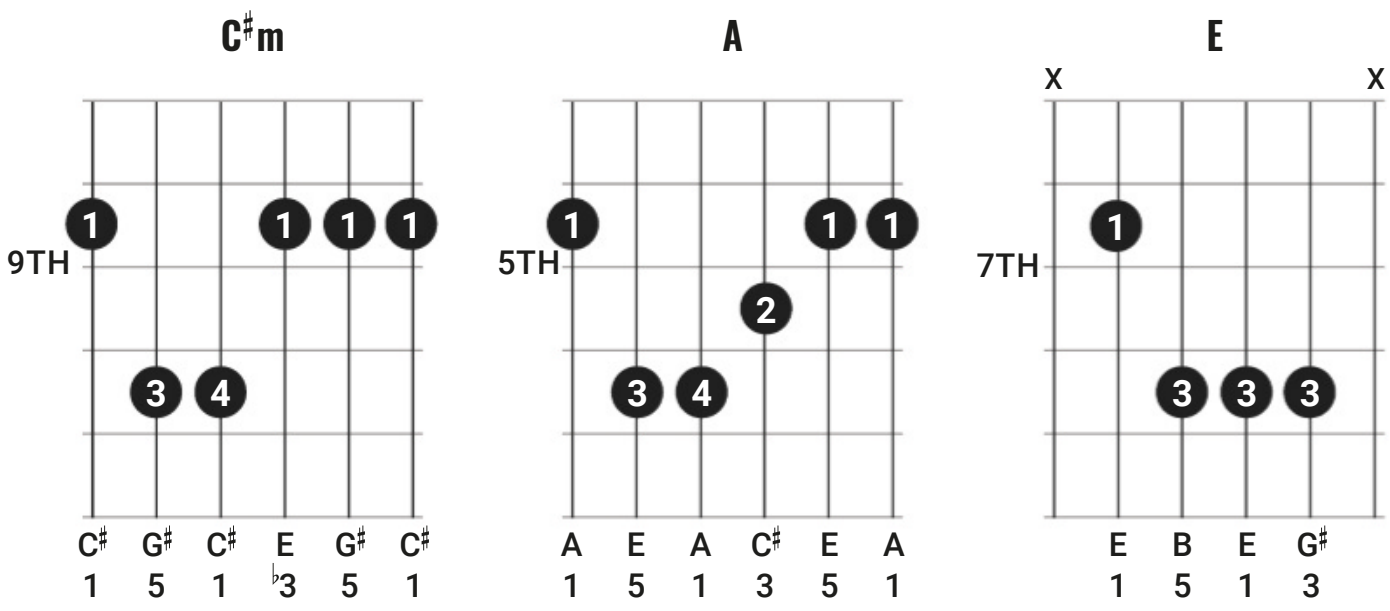


FIGURE 3

Here we have a chord sequence that would serve well as a prog-rock interlude, the kind of which so rarely seen in modern pop music. Try playing a bar each of C#m and A, followed by a bar of E, and half a bar of B and C. The C major might lead back to C#m and a repeat of this section, or back to figure 1 to begin the whole song again. In theory, the most likely chord to lead to C#m is G#, as we found in figure 1. This alternative B, C, C#m sequence is therefore very distinctive.



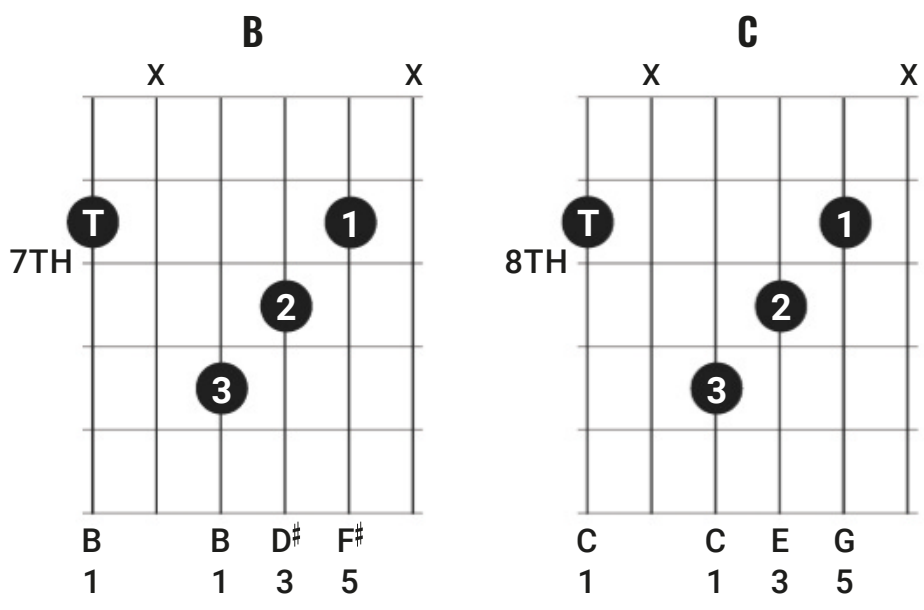


FIGURE 4

These chords would work well if we put down the pick and tried fingerpicking them. Using your thumb, alternate between the lowest two strings of each chord, on the beat. Meanwhile, play the top note of the chord with your middle finger at the same time as the first thumb note, and then fit in the note on the B string with your index finger, between the following bass notes. Play two bars of the first two chords, followed by two bars of the next two chords, before returning back to two bars each of D and Dsus2. The open D in the bass of all but one of these chords is known as a pedal note, and adds an interesting quality to what would otherwise be a straightforward sequence.

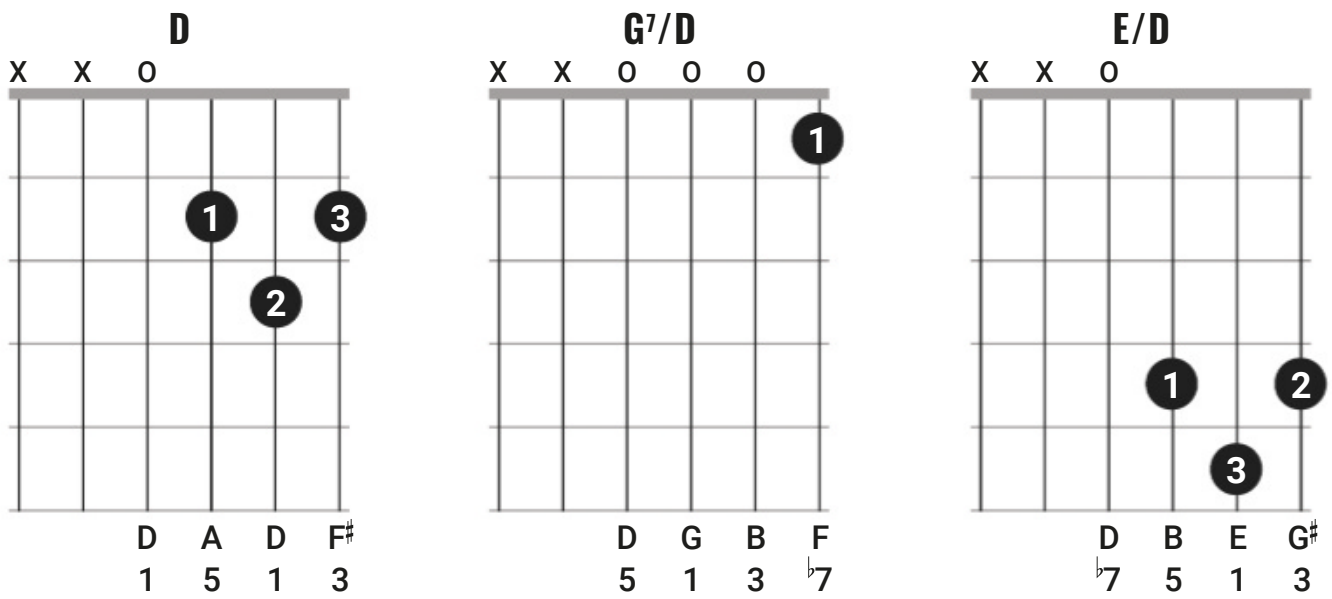
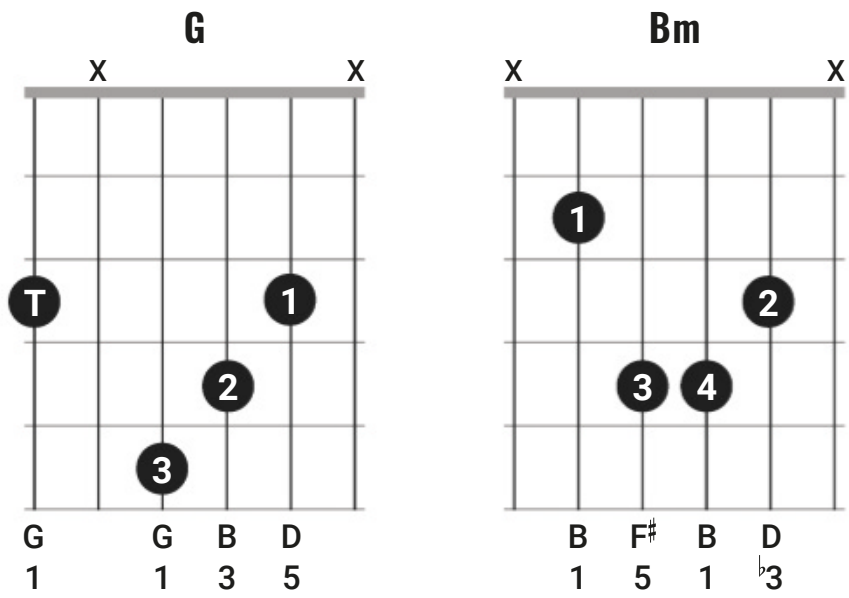


FIGURE 5

Most of the chords required for figure 5 can be found in the earlier examples: the four-chord sequence G, A, C, G, and then back to figure 4 via the Bm chord from figure 5 and E from figure 3, and then the A from figure 3. Most of the chords used in this instalment of Chord Clinic are root-position examples, which are ordinary majors and minors. The clever thing Gilmour and Pink Floyd did was to assemble these chords in stimulating and unusual ways, making use of key changes, pedal notes and unexpected cadences, thus creating the band's unique sound.



TALKBOX

CHARLES ESTEN

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The actor, musician and man behind Deacon Claybourne from hit US TV show *Nashville* talks dodgy guitars, getting better under pressure, and finding 'the one'

The moment it all started...

"The first acoustic guitars I liked would have been Simon and Garfunkel's – the rhythmic slapping that's all over *Mrs Robinson*. My mom says, when we used to go to the grocery store, I'd be in the front of the cart singing that one at the top of my lungs.

"My first try at playing guitar didn't go well. I think we lose a lot of great guitarists to terrible guitars – especially those with young fingers."

I couldn't live without my...

"I have a Martin D-28, which isn't old or anything – it's from about 2012 – but it was one of the first guitars they put in my hands as Deacon [Claybourne, Charles' character].

"I've also got a '55 J-200 that they had me play at Nashville On The Record, a concert we did at the Grand Ole Opry. Danny Rowe, who handled all the instruments on *Nashville*, got that for me. I'd been saying to him and Collin Linden [who played most of Deacon's guitar in *Nashville*], 'I want to buy a great guitar. Help me find *the one*.'

"They didn't have to say anything, because when I had that J-200, they couldn't stop looking at it. And I'm like, 'This might be *the one*?!' And they said, 'Yeah, that's *the one*!' I basically ended up not getting paid for that show – I turned my paycheque over to get this guitar."

The one that got away...

"That's my first electric guitar, a Hondo – just because it was my first electric. For sheer historical value, I would love to have that in my hands. And when you're as old as I am, it's probably a collector's item by now."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"When I first came to *Nashville*, I was writing with somebody and they strummed a guitar and I was like, 'Oh, what's that?', and they were in double drop D. So I like to put it into a quick double drop D and just strum that one time and feel how much it rumbles in my lap. I love double drop D because it takes out that third – sometimes the major's too happy and the minor's too sad.

"I think that has a lot to do with the character I played – the human experience is more complex than that. You'd ask him, 'Are you happy or are you sad right now?', and Deacon would go, 'Man, I don't know, I'm just in double drop D!' [laughs]

"I try to play something short enough that nobody in the store hears how crappy I am."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"When I started on *Nashville*, I met T-Bone Burnett [then the show's executive music producer] and went over to the studio in his house to record. He asked me to play something. I started banging on that acoustic, showing off all I could, probably breaking his heart with how I'm playing it. And he just said, without any judgement, 'You're strangling it – you're grabbing it too tight!'

"I was overplaying it. He taught me to let a guitar sit in your lap in a way that lets the soundboard ring. I'm lucky – few people get a T-Bone Burnett lesson on their first day at work. I always say that six years of *Nashville* was six years of paid guitar lessons for me – but I was the one who got paid!"

My Spinal Tap moment...

"Mistakes mean something different to great guitarists, because they can aim for perfection. I don't have a shot at perfection so I aim more for connection. Not that you can't get both – I've been to Mark Knopfler and Stevie Ray Vaughan concerts, and they were perfection *and* connection. But that must mean that the trainwrecks hurt even more for them."

My guilty pleasure...

"I have things that I know I'm supposed to like but don't. I guess it's the opposite of a guilty pleasure – it's a guilty non-pleasure."

I'm in the band...

"Maybe I could have been The Beatles' maracas player or something – because who would I replace? I'd just want to be there."

The most important thing on my rider...

"I'm afraid of what it will say about me if I say whiskey. But it's probably not the most important – that's probably hot tea with honey and lemon."

If I could just play one thing...

"You might want to reverse that question for me – 'is there any song you *have* been able to play?' It amazes me – some songs just sound incredibly difficult. There are songs I never thought I'd get. But then once you just spend time on them, it's crazy how good your fingers can get at one particular thing.

"I love Stevie Ray Vaughan. His *Little Wing* is astonishing. It's unapproachable for me and for most of us. So I have to say that."

For more on Charles' music, visit charlesesten.com

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